

Harry gave a short cry of pain as he was roughly pushed into the mud, his emerald green eyes glinting with pain behind his taped glasses and his mouth open in a silent cry of pain as the wind was forcefully pushed from his lungs. He lay there, panting and wheezing in near silence as Dudley Dursley's chubby face leered over him, grinning with savage pleasure as he deliberately stepped on Harry's schoolbag as he hopped up to the red school bus.

Harry tried to get up but winced in pain as the school bus doors closed and the driver, unable to see Harry stuck in the mud on such a cloudy and gloomy day, slowly pulled away from the curb and onto the street. Harry glanced after it with pained eyes as the clouds rumbled overhead, thunder booming and lightning flashed through the air as the first pelts of rain drifted downwards.

"I hate you Dudley," Harry whispered softly to himself, picking himself up from the mud and glancing down at himself in disgust and dismay. His blue school pants were dripping and his shoes, newly polished, were caked in wet mud. His eyes drifted towards his school bag, where Dudley's muddy footprint and his eyes widened with horror. He scrambled through the mud towards it and with fingers numbing from the cold, opened up the zipper.

Harry reached in with shaking hands and pulled out a pair of expensive binoculars. A large crack ran through one of the lenses and Harry groaned in misery. He had "borrowed" the binoculars from his Uncle Vernon so that he could show them off to his favourite teacher at playtime. He had meant to put them back when he got home, but now that he had missed the bus, Uncle Vernon was going to return from work sooner than Harry would be able to, and he would definitely notice that his binoculars were gone. What was worse, Dudley had broken them and Harry shuddered, dread settling in his heart as he placed the binoculars back in his schoolbag and lifted it up onto his back. Uncle Vernon was going to kill him, or at least, inflict a world of pain on him.

"Oh no, oh no, oh no," Harry muttered to himself, panic tearing in his voice. The seven-year old was shivering madly and only partly because of the cold. He was breathing deeply, fear etched into every

scar on his body, most courtesy of Uncle Vernon. "Please no. Not the binoculars, anything but them."

With fumbling hands, Harry reached into his shirt and drew upon his last article of faith, a small crucifix given to him by his Sunday school after church. Clasp ing it tightly between whitened knuckles, he closed his eyes and chanted to himself fervently.

"Please God; don't let this happen to me. Don't let them hurt me again," Harry mumbled softly, barely audible to himself over the noise of the rain. He squeezed his eyes shut and continued his prayer. "I always ask and you never answer, just this once God, don't let them."

Harry opened his eyes but the binoculars remained broken and worthless as they had been a few seconds ago and Harry sighed in resignation, his hope dying and his eyes fluttering shut. When he opened them again, they were dull and lifeless as he mentally prepared himself for what he knew was coming for him. Slowly, the seven-year old packed up his schoolbag and trudged his way down the road, ignoring the cars the sped past him.

As he stood on the corner of the street waiting to cross the road, a car screeched past, zooming into and out of a large muddy puddle on the road. The resulting spray struck Harry with moderate force, drenching him with muddy water and causing him to stagger back a few steps. Harry wiped the mud out of his eyes and glanced down at his shirt, which was covered in muddy grime. A glint caught his eye as his crucifix swayed in the wind, and suddenly anger surged into his body. His emerald eyes glinted with fury as he grasped the golden-coloured cross and yanked it with all his strength, snapping the cord that held it around his neck and hurling it at the muddy ground.

"You must hate me to make me live like this," Harry said angrily, glaring at the crucifix with all of his might as raindrops dripped down his cheek, mingling with the tears that fell from his eyes. "But I hate you just as much."

And with the shattering of his faith, Harry crossed the road, not knowing that he had just forsaken the one thing that could have

saved him from a temptation that would soon enter his life. Of course, had Harry known in advance what power succumbing to this temptation would give him; it was likely that he wouldn't have changed anything.

In a dark alley behind a small shopping centre located in Little Whinging, Surrey, a worn and shabby door was slammed open with such force that it was almost ripped off its hinges. A man, tall and gaunt with fiery eyes and a face that seemed to have been chiselled into an expression of anger and pain, staggered down the steps, leaning heavily against the rusty metal rail as he quickly limped away from the door. His clothes, a dark overcoat and a tattered pair of jeans, were ripped, burnt and splattered with blood, most of it his own. In his right hand, he held a sword, a lean and intricate blade that emanated a faint light as bolts and crackles of electricity ran through it, and in his left hand he clutched something close to heart as if it were the most precious thing in the world.

"I'm not getting out of this one," The man seemingly growled to nothing, exhaustion creeping through his voice. He cocked his head as though he were listening to somebody as he limped forward, staggering against the hard brick wall and leaving a thick trail of dark blood behind. His eyes quickly swept over the alley, noting the rusty metal bins, the large stack of full rubbish bags and the puddles of water forming beneath them all as the rain continued to pour.

"That's fucking bullshit and you know it," The man growled angrily, retorting to a statement that apparently only he could hear. He cocked his head again, before he stiffened as he heard something beyond the doorway.

He whirled around; moving far quicker than a man with his apparent injuries should be able to and levelled his sword at the dark doorway,. With a roar of fury, he thrust his sword forward and from the sharp tip came a brilliant flash of light. Lightning zapped forward, illuminating the entire alley for a split-second, before a thunderous echo blasted through the surrounding area. The conjured bolt of lightning disappeared into the darkness and although the man couldn't see into the unnatural shadows, he gave a dark smile as something behind

him loudly screeched in pain, a horribly chilling noise that would have sent shivers down a lesser person's spine.

The man panted softly as he leant against the brick wall of the alley, wincing in pain as more blood seeped from his wounds. He shook his head dazedly and lifted his left hand up from his heart, opening his bloodstained hand to stare at what lay inside. On his calloused palm lay a single silver coin, no bigger than the size of the man's knuckle. On one side of the coin, there was a rough and faded portrait of a solemn woman and when the man flipped the coin over, the other side revealed an insignia of some kind, made up of three short wave lines and a jagged triangle.

Suddenly there was a loud crashing noise from behind the man and he took a deep breath, steadying himself, before he clasped the coin in his hand and with all of his strength- which was far greater than that of a normal human being- hurled it over the shopping centre roof. He watched the silver coin arc through the air with wide eyes; as if he couldn't believe what he had just done, tracking it until it went over the roof and out of sight. The man was shaking, his hands trembling and quivering as he turned to face the threat alone, his sword coming up as darkness leapt from the doorway. Quivering and twisting shadows lanced out towards the man, who cut them down with deft strikes of his sword as if they were real matter. The injured man spun around, his sword flying through the air with a whistling noise as he struck down another tendril of darkness with ease, his teeth bared in animalistic rage.

For a few seconds, it seemed that the man was easily able to hold his own, but whether it was the wounds that caught up to him and slowed him down or the warped shadows that started striking out at faster speeds, after a mere fifteen seconds of battle, a shadow twisted out from the darkness and struck forward, twisting into the man's arm during mid-strike. The man screamed in agony as liquid shadow poured into his body and his hand reflexively convulsed, his sword flying out of his grasp, through the air and landing in the midst of the rusty metal garbage cans. The man fearfully glanced around him, his eyes wide and pleading as the shadows enveloped him and a torturous scream left his throat. It was at this time that a man emerged from the darkened hallway, dressed in a tan trench coat

with dark hair streaked with silver and sleepy, amused eyes as he regarded his foe.

“You will regret crossing us,” He said quietly, and the fallen man screamed again as the shadows converged on him. “Both of you.”

The screams intensified as the shadows twisted and flailed about madly, echoing in the small alley and bouncing off the walls into the open air.

On the other side of the building, Harry shivered as another piercing scream echoed around the desolate parking lot of the shopping centre. He stepped up his pace as he pulled his schoolbag closer to his shoulder, his nervous green eyes darting around his surroundings. In a last ditch attempt beat Vernon Dursley home, Harry had decided to take a shortcut through the shopping centre, which had been temporarily closed for a few weeks now after a freak power surge had somehow fried every electronic circuit in the building. He had been almost half-way across the parking lot when the horrible screaming had started, screaming that sent chills down his spine and tears to his eyes.

Another scream pitched in the nearby distance and Harry quickly broke out into a run, fear coursing through his veins, his eyes wide with terror. Because of the very-distracting screams and the constant rainfall, Harry didn't see the small crack in the parking lot pavement until it was too late. Harry gave a small cry of surprise as he lost his footing on the slippery surface as his right foot got caught in something and he fell heavily to the ground. Pain splintered in his knees and elbows as he whimpered to himself, his face half-covered by running water, which was circling to the nearby drain. Shivering, Harry tried to stagger up but pain lanced through him and he looked down at his legs. He had ripped the fabric of his pants around his right knee, which had been scraped badly and was bleeding already. His elbow was in a similar situation and Harry, like most seven-year-old boys, felt the onset of tears as he struggled to compose his face. Suddenly, something tinkled on the ground in front of him and Harry blinked behind his glasses, looking down. The moment he did, he instantly forgot his pains.

The object that had attracted his attention was a small, silver coin. Harry could see a faint profile of a solemn-looking woman on the side facing upwards, but it didn't look like the Queen at all. What's more, there was something about this coin that had Harry instantly hooked. His pains and fears forgotten, Harry studied the coin with supernatural intensity, his eyes staring at it unblinkingly. Although his left hand was trembling with both fear and coldness as he used it to prop himself up, his right hand steadily and slowly reached out to grab the coin. The fingers hovered over the coin for a split-second, before Harry grasped it with the tips of his fingers and clasped it in his palm.

Immediately, Harry felt something searing into his palm, something unbelievable hot and painful and he screamed out loud, flailing and kicking about as he shook his right hand about. His body collapsed to the wet asphalt again as he shook his right hand up and down, trying in desperation and fear to let go of the coin, or whatever was causing his pain. Tears flowed from his eyes as pain wracked his body and he continued to scream, a childish whimpering that could barely be heard over the rain and thunder. Suddenly, the previous screaming started again and this time, it hit Harry like a shockwave. Fear spread over his body like he had never felt before, dread settled in his stomach and his head pounded. He had to get out of here, he had to get home! He had to get anywhere, as long as it wasn't here! He had to get up, to run, get up and run....get up and run...get up and run...get up and run! Get up and run, now!

For a second, Harry could have sworn he heard somebody screaming for him to run, a woman with a beautiful and melodious voice, but he darted his eyes around him and there was nobody there. Still, his instincts served him well as he jumped up and grabbed his schoolbag, his other pain seemingly fading away into nothingness as he started his flight at a sprint, tearing through the car park at speeds unusual for a normal seven-year-old. As he ran, another scream belted out into the air, which only served to spur Harry on, but this scream was suddenly cut off in its peak and Harry somehow knew that the person screaming was dead.

So he ran faster.

It only took Harry ten minutes to arrive at Privet Drive, a time especially impressive for a seven-year-old boy, but Harry didn't know this as he sprinted past Mrs Figg's house, the batty cat-loving babysitter and approached Number Four. Relief sagged on his features at the sight of the house, which would have been most unusual for anybody who knew of the true environment of the house, but Harry tiredly staggered past the white-picket fence and approached the door as if he would rather be no where else. With wet and muddy hands, Harry opened the door and jumped inside, slamming it shut and locking it instantly and pressing his back on it. For a second, he stood there, his heart thumping in his chest and his breaths coming out short and gasping. A smile of relief curved his pale and trembling lips as he stood up, his legs aching from the run and his hand still clasped around the small coin, which had stopped burning him.

But the smile disappeared an instant later as he looked forward to see Vernon Dursley standing in front of him in a long-white shirt with his tie partially undone. The man's beady eyes were narrowed and his face was darkening in anger as he regarded his most hated nephew, the bane of his prefect suburban life. Vernon's beady eyes flickered over to the mud and water that was dripping from Harry's sopping clothes onto the shiny floorboards and his mouth tightened in anger.

"So boy, do you have a good reason to explain your lateness?" Vernon spat out angrily, his piggy eyes reflecting the vast amount of hatred that he felt for his abnormal nephew. "And you've made a big mess! Who do you think will have to clean this all up? I know it won't be you, you ungrateful dirty slob! It will be your poor Aunt Petunia, who has enough to do around the house without adding your negligent mess to her workload!"

Harry kept his head low and mumbled an apology, his entire body shivering as the adrenaline left him and the chill settled in. He kept his head low as he tried to shuffle around his Uncle, heading for his small cupboard under the stairs. But Vernon wasn't finished with him just yet and a meaty hand clasped itself roughly around Harry's

shoulder, whirling him around painfully to face his Uncle, who regarded the boy with eyes full of disgust and anger.

"You didn't answer me, boy," He growled softly, squeezing down painfully on Harry's shoulder and causing the boy to whimper softly. "Where were you?"

Harry squirmed as his shoulders ached under his Uncle's hand and he stuttered out his answer, his eyes wide and fearful. "I m-missed the bus so I had to w-walk home!"

"That's not what Dudley told me," Vernon growled, tightening his grip and eliciting a small cry of pain from Harry. "He told me that you said you had better things to do than to come home, like you were told!"

Harry once again squirmed under his Uncle's grip, and his soaked schoolbag slipped off his other shoulder and onto the ground with a loud thump, far louder than a seven-year-olds bag should be. Vernon's eyes flickered down to the bag and a tight smile came over his face as something occurred to him.

"You've been stealing, boy, haven't you?" He whispered harshly bending down to pick the schoolbag up with his other hand. He let go of Harry, who scooted backwards as he quickly pulled open the zipper, talking all the time. "You've become like you're parents, a rotten, pathetic low-life criminal, despite our best efforts to turn you into a normal, civilised person. Who did you steal from, boy? Was it the school, the shops? Have you been shoplifting? Have you any idea what the neighbour would say if they found out that..."

Vernon's voice trailed off as he pulled out his broken pair of binoculars, cracked and useless from Harry's dreadful afternoon, and his eyes widened in shock and fury. Although Harry didn't know it, those binoculars had been a gift to Vernon by his father before he had passed away, and now they were broken, destroyed and ruined, and it was all that stupid boys fault!

"How dare you!" Vernon boomed angrily, his voice rising to epic proportions as he glared at Harry with the utmost fury his beady eyes could deliver. His face was purpling as blood rushed to his

cheeks, his veins throbbing with rage, and he growled incoherently as he moved forward, seizing Harry by the shoulder with a tight grip. Ignoring Harry's cry of pain and stammered protests, he dragged the wet and shivering boy from the door to the cupboard, kicking it open with his feet.

Harry gave a loud cry of pain as his Uncle tightened his grip on his shoulder, until he was positive that the beefy man had broken a bone, before Vernon hurled him into the small cupboard under the stairs like a rag-doll. Harry was thrown to the floor and landed roughly, pain lancing through his small and already-aching body. Tears welled in his eyes as he struggled up, turning around to face his violently angry Uncle, who stood outside the cupboard as he glared down at his nephew.

"Uncle Vernon..." He started in a pleading tone.

He was interrupted as Vernon raised his hand and backhanded Harry aside with great strength, his brawny palm slapping Harry aside with ease. Harry gave a cry of pain as he slammed into the wall and his vision flared as his head cracked on the edge of his small, wooden bed. He lay there, barely conscious as Vernon slammed the cupboard door shut. Distantly, Harry could hear the sounds of the locks on the cupboard being bolted and with a shaking hand, reached up to touch his head. Amidst the wet hair and muddy skin, Harry could feel a thick, oozing liquid gashing from his skull and took one look at it on his hand before he promptly fell unconscious.

The next time Harry opened his eyes, he was lying in complete darkness. There was no light and no sound, and Harry could only hear the noise of his breathing, which had quickened in fright as he desperately tried to feel his bed or clothes box or anything else in his cupboard. But his hands came up empty and a soft whimper escaped his mouth as he hugged himself close. Suddenly, a speck of light burst out of nothingness right in front of him, a small sparkle of silver that instantly gained Harry's attention. With a shaking hand, he fumbled in the darkness until he touched the sparkle. The instant he did, the sparkle flared in a powerful, bright light and everything instantly changed.

The darkness receded in a blink of an eye and from the light came the most beautiful garden Harry had ever seen. Grass sprouted from every inch of dirt, lush thick and healthy. Rows upon rows of flowers appeared from nowhere, purple-hued violets, red roses and white lilies sprouting from the ground with the grass. Trees appeared in much the same manner, as if they had been set to fast-forward, popping from the ground and stretching out to touch the sparkling azure sky, branches budding off from the trunk and leaves shooting out from the branches. The sun beat down from the sky, partially hidden by a few white fluffy clouds. Harry picked himself up from the ground in amazement, his green eyes wide behind his glasses. Although the sight of the garden was more than amazing, it was the feeling of the place that had Harry instantly hooked. The entire place smelt of something so fresh and beautiful that Harry had never experienced anything like it before. The mere smell took away his pains and aches, leaving his entire body revitalised. His mind cleared of sorrow, of pain, of despair as he spun around, laughing happily as he gazed at this little stretch of paradise.

However, his laughter faded as he gaped open-mouthed as the most beautiful woman he had ever seen approached him, smiling serenely. With dark hair that sparkled in the soft light and silver eyes that regarded him with affection and fondness, the woman seemed to glide rather than walk over the grass and flowers, her white and silver dress flapping slowly in the soft, comfortable breeze. Harry watched with wide eyes as the woman approached him, stopping a few metres away from him. His mouth open and closed as he tried to say something, anything, but his mind was a blank, so he just stood there, staring.

The woman seemed to recognise this and spoke first, a melodious and beautiful voice that soothed Harry's heart with ease and adoration.

"I am Meciél," She introduced herself quietly. "And you are Harry Potter."

This was enough to temporarily break Harry out of his stupor and he licked his lips nervously, his eyes still riveted on the angelic figure in front of him.

“W-Where are we?” He asked softly, his voice small.

“We are in your mind,” The woman answered, gesturing to the beautiful surroundings. “I created this garden to put you at ease, to make you feel better. I hope it has had the intended effect.”

“This...this isn’t real?” Harry asked softly, his eyes finally moving away from the woman as he knelt down, taking the stem of one of the flowers and plucking it out of the ground. He raised it to his nose, inhaling the beautiful scent of the rose, before he looked back at the woman, his face crestfallen. “But it feels so real.”

“I made it feel real, just for you,” Meciél answered softly and gestured to the patch of grass where he had just plucked the flower.

Harry blinked and looked down, seeing another dark-red rose sprout from the ground in less than a second. He returned his gaze to the woman, his face serious.

“Are you an angel?” Harry asked her.

Meciél smiled, and although there was a faint trace of bitterness to it, Harry wasn’t aware of it as the smile burned into him, his heart soaring as he absorbed the radiance of the woman’s beauty.

“In a way,” Meciél answered pleasantly.

“I meant what I said before,” Harry said softly. “I still hate God.”

“As do I,” The woman answered softly, a smile of understanding on her face. Harry’s startled eyes met hers as she folded her arms together and began to explain.

“I was once an angel, a servant of God, existing only to do His bidding,” Meciél started softly, her silver eyes distant. “In those times, both heaven and the mortal realm openly lived side-by-side, mortal by angel, and we were all happy. However, after some time, mortal women and angels fell in love with each other and produced offspring. This angered God greatly and He decreed that all such offspring

should die. I was given the task of hunting one of these hybrids down; however, as I faced it, sword of blazing fire in my hands, I could not strike it down, for it was an innocent, unknowing of what it had done wrong. God saw this and for my punishment, He banished me to the darkness, away from heaven and mortal realm, alone in the shadows, similar to what you experienced before I created this garden for you. That is my punishment, which is the punishment for most of the angels He has banished. We are the Fallen and we are alone in the darkness. We have only light, one object that can tie us to the mortal world."

Here her gaze drifted down to his right hand and Harry followed it, unclenching it and staring at his palm, where he had picked up that coin. The skin was unmarred and undamaged, except for the centre of his palm, where a symbol comprised of three short wavy lines and a jagged triangle had been engraved into his skin.

"My coin allows me to communicate with a single human being, to experience happiness and light once again. In exchange, I offer my wisdom, my experiences and my power to aid this human for whatever he or she needs it for," Meciél dropped to her knees, her silver eyes locked onto Harry's emerald orbs. "I can help you, Harry."

"How?" Harry asked in a whisper.

"I can guide you and aid you. I can share my knowledge with you, knowledge of powerful magic and skill lost to the ages. I can show you how to become powerful, show you how to become strong and great. I can help you become the most powerful man in history, if that is what you wish. I can show you how to defend yourself so that nobody will ever be able to hurt you again, even your Uncle." Meciél whispered intently.

"You saw that?" Harry asked softly, ducking his eyes from her gaze.

"I see everything you see, I hear everything you hear, I smell everything you smell, I feel everything you feel and I know everything you know," Meciél said softly and gently. "That is the price for my aid, my power, my strength."

She regarded Harry with tender gentleness, a sad smile on her face as he refused to meet her eyes.

“Feel no shame, beloved one,” Meciél whispered soothingly. “You are the victim here, a victim of your Uncle and a victim of a world that doesn’t care about you. Allow me to help you and you will become so strong that nobody will ever hurt you again.”

Harry hesitated, wanting desperately to agree, to accept, to allow this beautiful and kind woman, or angel, to help him. But she wasn’t an angel anymore. God had banished her, and Harry knew from Church and Sunday school that if he accepted this offer, his soul wouldn’t go to heaven.

“Harry, God has forsaken you,” Meciél said softly, intently. “He has left you to your fate, he has abandoned you. He doesn’t care about your pains and sufferings and He doesn’t care about you. Why honour such a being that refuses to help those who worship Him in their hour of need?”

Harry sagged as the words struck him with full force, desperately wanting to deny it. But God had let Uncle Vernon beat him and hurt him his entire life, God had let Aunt Petunia shove him in this cupboard ever since he was a baby and God had let Dudley pick on him and bash him up everyday. God had even let his parents die to that stupid drunk-driver, and Harry knew that his parents would have at least loved him, if nothing else.

“Harry, God does not care,” Meciél repeated intently and then allowed a soft, gentle smile to curve her lips. “But I care, Harry. I care about your pains. I care that you suffer. I care that you live alone. We are alike, Harry, so very alike. Help me help you. Take my hand, Harry, and let us both never endure the darkness alone ever again.”

Meciél extended one of her pale, dainty hands and regarded Harry with an expression of kindness and gentleness. Harry took a deep breath and slid his palm into hers.

The first thing he noticed was that the skin was warm and soft as Meciél’s fingers enclosed around his hand. However, a split-second

later Harry cried out in shock as something seared into him, a torrent of liquid heat that started from Meciél's hand and flowed into his body. He glanced down at his hand in panic, and then raised his head to stare at Meciél, who was eyeing him intently, her eyes serious. Around them, the grass and flowers withered away as steam rose in the air. Harry could smell sulphur and brimstone in the air. The ground cracked and rumbled, trees withering and becoming no more than wasted, petrified husks. The darkness enveloped him, roared through him, bright yellow and red flames bursting in large geysers from the ground. Harry desperate tried to tug his hand away from Meciél, but her grip was as hard as steel. For a brief second, Harry's emerald eyes met those of Meciél's silver eyes, before everything went dark again and the smell of burning sulphur overpowered his senses.

When Harry awoke in his dark cupboard he could still smell and taste the lingering remains of sulphur and his face scrunched up in disgust. He suddenly stiffened as everything flooded back to him and he sat up from the cold ground, his eyes frantically darting around his cupboard. There were no signs of a garden, or of fire and steam, and for a second Harry thought that it had just been a dream. But the aches and pains that had accompanied him into this cupboard were gone and his clothes were dry. That was when he felt a quick burning sensation in his right palm and he quickly brought his hand up into the light coming through the cracks of the door. When he unclenched his hand, he saw a small silver coin lying in his palm.

'I am here, beloved one,' said a soothing female voice. 'I have healed your wounds for you.'

Harry whirled around, his eyes wide as he tried to find the source of the voice. But his cupboard was completely empty as usual, save for the few spiders that walked darting out of their webs and away from Harry, as if they could sense something about him that they didn't like.

'I exist only in your mind,' Meciél said. 'However...'

Suddenly Meciél appeared in his cupboard, dressed in the same silver and white clothes as she had been before. Her dark hair spilled

over her shoulders as she sat on his small bed, glancing around the cupboard with barely hid disgust.

“You’re really here!” Harry breathed softly, his eyes glued to the woman.

“No,” Meciél said in her lilting voice. “I am merely creating an illusion in your mind that let’s you see me. If anybody else were to come in here, although I do not know why they would want to, they would only see you talking to your bed.”

Harry frowned and hesitantly reached over with his hand and laid it on the Fallen’s arm. It felt real, warm and alive, and Harry quickly pulled his hand back.

“You’re making me feel that, aren’t you?” Harry asked softly.

“Yes,” Meciél answered simply.

Harry nodded slowly. “What do I do now?” He asked her.

Meciél cocked her head in thought, regarding him carefully. “I can sense your skills, my beloved. I feel that you have little inborn skill with thaumaturgy. Your evocation skills are also below average. However, I sense great potential in your skills as a wand-wizard. We shall work from that to begin with. With practise, we can make a very man out of you yet.”

Harry stared at her in incomprehension, clearly not understanding a word of what she had just said. He frowned and was about to ask a question when he saw a flicker of something out of the corner of his eye. His head snapped to the left, but there was nothing there, merely a darkened corner of his small cupboard. Yet as he gazed around, he could feel rather than see something that lay below his ordinary sight.

“What is this?” He asked quickly.

“That is your Third Sight, a Wizard’s Sight,” Meciél answered. “Most wand-wizards are unable to use this gift and the few that do quickly

go insane. Whenever you gaze at something with Third Sight, it will remain in your memories forever.”

“What’s Third Sight?” Harry asked, struggling to keep the panic out of his voice as something else flashed in the corner of his eye.

“The ability to see beyond the physical surface, to see into the deeper surfaces of emotion, magical phenomena, and so forth,” Meciell answered and a slight smile appeared on her face. “The next time you see a flicker, I will activate it for you, if that is your wish. Once I have done that, you will know how to turn this gift on and off at your will. Do you wish me to continue?”

Harry slowly nodded and waited in near silence. The only sound was his breathing as he sat in his small cupboard, until another flicker appeared in the corner of his eye. He felt a small tingle beneath his eyes and reflexively closed them. The retina of his eyeballs briefly itched, and then it was over. When Harry opened his eyes again, he was using his Third Sight, and what he saw made him scream in horror.

The true physical appearance of his cupboard was still there, but it had faded and something else had appeared. Later on, when Harry was coherent again, he would express to Meciell that he couldn’t find the words to describe what he had seen. The most he could say was that it was as if a thick cloth had just been lifted over his eyes and he could see with every one of his senses. The wood of the cupboard, although long rendered from the forest, were also large, spectre trees, swaying gently in the breeze. The wood was also a piece of burning timber, which was being consumed in ghostly flames. Harry could smell the smoke from the flames and the soft scent from the trees as he wrestled with past, present and future. The cupboard was a place of misery and pain for the one who lived in it and under the Sight; these emotions were visible in ways Harry couldn’t describe. Dark blotches of fear and loneliness permanently etched itself into Harry’s mind, searing into his memory. Anger and hatred burnt their way into his eyes, igniting an unholy bloodlust in his veins. Despair hung like a slimy moss, sickening and a perversion of true human nature. Harry saw all of this, more and everything. He saw ghostly figures of himself crying underneath sadness and despair, angry spectres under hatred

and desire for revenge and so much more. In the middle of all of this, untouched by Harry's Sight, sat Meciél, who watched him with luminous silver eyes and an all-knowing gaze.

In the end, Harry couldn't take stand that cupboard for a second longer and without knowing it, crouched up as far as he could and slammed his shoulder into the locked door. Demonic strength filtered into his veins and he blow, which ordinarily wouldn't have hurt a seven-year-old girl, knocked the cupboard door clean off its hinges, allowing Harry to escape from the cesspit of negative emotion that was his cupboard.

He emerged in the hallway, panting as if he had just run a marathon while still gazing around the house, where ghostly fires burned away, unseen by all. He barely heard the rumbling footsteps as Vernon exited the kitchen, his face twisted up into annoyance. Harry glanced up as he felt somebody approach and shuddered as he saw the true form of Vernon Dursley. Dark emotions clung around the man, irritation at those below him, disgust for the abnormal, revulsion for those who didn't fit his vision of a pure society, and a high degree of malevolence and hatred for Harry. The instant Harry glanced at his Uncle, a leering skull appeared above the portly man's head. It was death. His Uncle would be involved in a death in the near-future and Harry, under the influence of his Sight and the physical manifestation of the hatred Vernon had for him, soundlessly cried out for help, certain that he was about to be killed.

'How may I aid you?'

"I can't let them kill me, I won't let them kill me, help me!"

"You have my power, beloved. Take your revenge and defend yourself!"

Harry let out a twisted laugh as dark power flooded through his body, sulphur burning into his nostrils. Power lay at his fingertips, a force that Harry had never felt before. He was in control, he was powerful! Nobody could hurt him again! Nobody could kill him; destroy him, especially not his pathetic, weak-minded Uncle! He was invincible and almighty and as he felt his body change into something strong

and terrifying, he allowed himself to roar as he faced his uncle, who was frozen in fear, and prepared to take his revenge.

Mrs Sutton from Number Five Privet Drive was an aging woman with a penchant for dramas, especially *The Bill*. She, much like Vernon Dursley, enjoyed the normalcy and reliability of her suburban life, and despised those who differed from her. However, like Petunia Dursley, she was also had a very nosy nature, so when she heard a young boy screaming for his life from across the road, she hurried out of her chair and peered out of her curtains. Frowning, she regarded Number Four with calculating eyes, almost certain that the scream had been that bastard Potter boy. After a few seconds, she dropped the curtains and turned back to her flickering TV screen. It was at this moment that a loud, bestial roar blasted throughout the street.

Mrs Sutton turned back to the window, quickly opening them and peering down at Number Four, where loud screams of agony and terror, both male and female, young and old, could be heard. Fear rushed through her as the screams continued and her hands were shaking as she peered out of her curtains. Suddenly one of the screams was suddenly cut off and the female shrieking stopped. The lone male continued screaming in anguish, an ear-splitting screech, and the curtains were parted. Mrs Sutton watched with wide eyes and trembling lips as Vernon Dursley pounded against the window, his face bloodied and desperate, before he suddenly whirled around. Vernon screamed again as something approached him, although Mrs Sutton couldn't see who it was. Suddenly Vernon was snatched from the window, torn in half and thrown aside; blood splattering against the windows planes in thick rivers of crimson. Something screeched again, this time in triumph and victory, and the very notes of the screech send goosebumps down Mrs Sutton's spine and she fled the curtains, using her trembling hands to pick up the telephone from the receiver and dialling the police.

"Hello?" she said in a quavering voice, fear wracking her entire body. "There's been a murder at Number Four Privet Drive! You have to come now!"

Suddenly an explosion rocked the ground and hurled Mrs Sutton to the floor. With a groan, she landed on the ground roughly and pain

spiked through her ribs. She looked up towards the window and through the curtains; she could see flames jutting from the house across the road.

No less than a minute later, a small, young boy completely drenched in blood staggered from the house, using the shadows to hide his form as he ignored the searing flames, which seemingly had no effect on him. The powerful scent of sulphur and brimstone filled the air as the fires continued burning, and the small boy slipped away as the first of the neighbours arrived outside the former Dursley residence, staring at the flames with wide eyes, dripping a trail of blood behind him, the blood of his hated relatives, now all dead. As the Police and Fire Brigade tore up the residential street, sirens wailing furiously, thousands of kilometres away, in a large magical castle, Albus Dumbledore looked down at one of his instruments with dread.

Number Four Privet Drive was no more.

The stars were just beginning to twinkle as the sun slowly set over England, casting beautiful hues of soft-red and golden light over those who took the time to admire the view, and darkness was approaching. But to the residents and visitors to Privet Drive, located in Little Whinging, Surrey, it seemed as if it was still as bright as it had been at midday. However, this could have be attributed to the large blankets of dark smoke rising into the air and the massive blazing inferno that was currently tearing through Number Four. Neighbour's watched from their houses as dozens of firemen fought the flames with their hoses, pumping out hundreds of gallons of water as they desperately and unsuccessfully tried to quell the fire. But the fire continued to rage, angry yellow and red flames jutting from the windows and roof as if they were alive. The overpowering smell of sulphur reeked through the air, irritating the eyes and noses of the neighbours and the few unmasked firemen.

This was the scene that greeted Albus Dumbledore as he briskly strode from Mrs Figgs house, his blue eyes alert and serious as he quickly observed the situation. His purple coloured, yellow-stared robe flapped in the wind as he crinkled his nose up, the wind bringing the smell of sulphur to his attention. For a moment, he just stood, tall and unmoving as his mind whirled with possible scenarios, before his eyes flickered over the struggling fire-fighters and the blazing inferno and he seemingly made a decision. He quickly moved forward, his robes twirling as he brushed past a family of four watching the flames silently, who strangely took no notice of the odd man and his odder clothing.

Albus Dumbledore continued to walk forward, approaching the blazing house as he moved past the fire-engines and fire-fighters, the latter taking no notice of him as if he wasn't even there. His long, crooked nose sniffed the air the smell of sulphur became stronger and stronger, and he knew that this was no coincidence. He paused near the edge of the curb and reached into his robes, pulling out a long, slender wand. As he did this, he cocked his head as the conversation of two black-faced, sweaty firemen reached his ears.

"This fire should have gone down by now," One of them said tiredly, while his partner chugged down a bottle of water. "But it just keeps growing and growing. It's not right, man!"

The other man lowered his bottle and swallowed, and his eyes darted around as he leaned in closer to his friend. "Can't you smell it? That's sulphur in the air, mate."

His partner looked at him, incomprehension showing on his face, and the fireman sighed impatiently.

"Sulphur, also known as brimstone," He said in annoyance. "Fire and brimstone, eternal punishment, torment and anguish, hell, does this ring any bells?"

"Don't be stupid," The other fireman snorted, but doubt flickered over his face as he gazed at the blazing house and sniffed the air. "You're saying that, what? Satan did this?"

"I don't know mate," The other fireman said tiredly. "All I know is that the people in that house are dead, and I bet you twenty-pounds that they died painfully."

Albus had heard enough as he moved away and approached the house. A flick of his wand and a muttered incantation turned the sensation of searing heat into one of pleasant coolness. He then levelled his wand at the house and performed a lazy swish, not even bothering to mutter the incantation. The tip of the wand glowed pale blue, a shimmering cone of magic blasting forward and striking the flames. However, the shimmering pale-blue cone of magic flared up in a dark light, the smell of sulphur becoming even more pronounced as Dumbledore gripped his wand tighter, his light-blue eyes narrowing as he poured magic into his spell. The dark light flickered and pulsed as the soft-blue glow flared up in response, and the dark flare receded. Dumbledore continued pushing back the dark magic that had intercepted his spell, his expression grim and determined, and after a few more seconds, the dark light dissipated and the flames immediately died down, allowing the fire-fighters to push forward.

As soon as the spell was over, Albus stood tall again; his face pale as he breathed in huge gulps of air. That fire hadn't been of the normal type, no, there had been very powerful dark magic behind it, dark

magic that Albus had never heard of before. This was no accident, this was murder. He stared at the blazing house, in which the fires were quickly dying down as the last of their dark origin faded away, and shook his head slowly. Who had done this, and more importantly, was Harry Potter still inside?

At the same time, several blocks away, Harry Potter had staggered past the brightly lit houses and into an empty block of land. The only sound Harry could hear was the sound of his own thumping heartbeat, the splat of his shoes as he stepped in large puddles of muddy water and the noise of the grass rustling in the cool breeze, a breeze that was especially chilly for Harry, who shivered in his wet, blood-splattered clothes. His Sight was off and in the back corner of his mind, Harry knew that he could now turn it off and on at will, but the majority of his mind was focussed on the events that had passed no less than half-an-hour ago. He knew that he should feel shocked; he knew that he should feel sad or angry at himself. But his mind was completely numb, his eyes wide-open and glazed over as he staggered over a dead tree root and settled down on a sawn-off tree trunk. He had murdered somebody, hell; he had murdered three people, and his own family. True, he had never liked them and the feelings had been mutual, but he was a killer, and what was worse, he had liked it.

Smell of blood...so powerful, so overwhelming....Aunt Petunia cowering before him...her face is terrified, pleading, begging and tears of fright down her cheeks...powerful bestial roar...ashen wings of bones, sharp and spiked edges flying forward...blood, so much blood...and it was wonderful, better than anything he had ever experienced...

Harry shuddered and instantly cast his mind away from his memories. The taste of warm blood lingered on his tongue and he squeezed his eyes shut, a tear rolling from his eyes and down his cheek. He hated the fact that he liked it, liked the feeling of taking another's life, of ripping them apart with strength that he hadn't even known he had possessed, of tasting their blood...

"Do not go down this road, beloved," a beautiful voice said softly and Harry opened his eyes, bloodshot emerald orbs that swivelled around

to centre of Meciél. The Fallen angel approached him from beyond the empty plot, looking prim, proper and totally unconcerned as her face reflected her serenity. Although her long, dark hair softly swayed in the breeze, no mud or water soiled her beautiful silver and white dress and she shone with an inner light that radiated from her very being, highlighting her beauty.

“Did...” Harry started, his voice especially rough for a seven year old, and stopped, swallowing as Meciél approached him. He licked his lips and tried again. “Did you know that would happen?”

Meciél tilted her head, regarding him with composed silver orbs as she answered. “I suspected something of the nature would occur,” she said quietly.

It was then Harry focussed his full attention on her, anger blossoming in the pit of his stomach. Meciél seemed immune to his glare, which was especially intimidating coming from one literally soaked in the blood of his victims, and came to stand beside him, her eyes drifting upwards towards the stars.

“If you...if you suspected, why did you let me...” Harry started and stopped, his voice quavering. Another tear pooled down his cheek as the severity, the wrongness of what he had just done hit him again and he gave a childish groan of anguish and buried his face in his hands, sobbing quietly.

“Do not mourn, beloved, for they deserved what they received,” Meciél said quietly and placed a warm, comforting hand on Harry’s shoulder. “Besides, do not tell me that you did not enjoy taking your revenge and did not enjoy finally standing up for yourself against those bullies.”

Blood still filled the air, a substance more tantalising and delicious than he had ever known...the broken and mangled body of Aunt Petunia stared at him with glassy eyes from the ground...bony wings flapped restlessly as he walked forward, clawed feet scraping the ground...anger, rage and intense pleasure filled him...this time Dudley stares at him, a pathetic child weeping for his life...vaguely human hands, covered in scales, seize the boy, long fingers wrapping

around the neck...claws dig into the skin as a searing heat flares through his veins...Dudley screams in agony as fire juts from his eyes, nostrils, ears and open wailing mouth as he is burnt alive by the fires of hell.....

Harry sniffled into his hands and looked up, meeting the silver orbs of Meciél with his haunted eyes as accusation quickly spread over his face, tinged with anger and disgust.

"What did you do?" He whispered softly, his throat raw from his crying and his face splotchy and red. "What did you make me do?"

"I did nothing, beloved," Meciél said softly, her hand moving down to his back and making soothing motions. "What happened was your doing, and you're doing alone."

"I killed them," Harry said numbly. "I murdered them. The police will come after me, they'll catch me! They'll throw me in jail! I'm going to jail!"

"There is no mortal jail that could possible hope to contain you," Meciél said softly. "You are safe from them and I will continue to protect you."

Harry nodded slowly, his head still bowed, and fiddled with his hands as he sat. A few moments later, he spoke again and this time, the hysteria was out of his voice.

"You wanted them dead, didn't you?" Harry asked softly.

Meciél regarded him solemnly.

"Yes," she answered truthfully.

"Why?"

"They were more useful to you dead than alive. You need a fresh start, to remove the shackles of your past and banish your demons," Meciél answered, her melodious voice quiet. "No pun intended, beloved."

"There must have been other ways, something that didn't involve...this," Harry said, his voice rising as he spat out the last word in disgust.

"This was the easiest," Meciél said and a faint smile touched her lips as she finished. "And it was the most satisfying."

Harry stared at her in shock and betrayal, his eyes widening as he staggered off the tree trunk, his mouth open. "I don't believe you when you say you did nothing. Even if I could have, I wouldn't have done that before I met you. You made me do this, you tricked me into it!" He said loudly, anger rising in his voice. He could feel something burning inside of him. It was rough and hot, but not uncomfortable. With a shock, Harry realised that it was the same feeling he had gotten when he picked up the coin and he looked down at his right hand, where he still clasped the small piece of silver.

"I should throw you away and never see you again," Harry muttered softly. "I should bury you and never come back here."

"Then what would you do?" Meciél asked softly, regarding Harry with what seemed like sympathy and compassion. "You no longer have a home. You have no friends. You have no family, not after what you did to them tonight. Where can you go to, an orphanage? You do remember what your Uncle told you about those. Will you live on the streets, scrounging for food for the rest of your life, begging for scraps so that you can live one more pitiful day?"

Harry didn't say anything and stood unmoving as the illusion of Meciél approached him, laying a hand on his shoulder. Instantly, warmth flooded through his body at her touch and he sighed despite himself.

"I said I would protect you, beloved, and I will," Meciél continued, her voice warm with affection. "But only if you let me. I will help you to the best of my ability. I will make you strong. But only if you let me."

Harry shuddered as he closed his eyes, gritting his teeth in anger as he fought against the warmth in his heart.

"No," He mumbled softly. "Go away."

"Beloved..." Meciél started but Harry took a step backward and the warmth suddenly vanished, leaving a cold ache in the pit of his chest. His eyes were right with anger and grief as he swatted an arm at the Fallen woman, his breathing rapid and harsh.

"Go away now," Harry cried out angrily, his voice rising in the noiseless plot. "Or...Or I'll throw your coin away forever!"

Meciél eyed him carefully, her face smoothing over and her silver eyes meeting Harry's emerald. After a few tense moments, she bowed her head in subservience.

"Very well, beloved," She said softly. "I will depart and leave you to your thoughts. Know that I am in your mind and all you have to do is call me and I shall come."

"I won't," Harry spat out with childish anger as the illusion broke away in front of him, vanishing instantly, and once again, he was all alone. Sighing, he wrapped his hands around himself and walked back to the footpath. He had no idea where he was going, but he knew he couldn't stay there. So the small form of the blood-soaked boy slowly left the place he had known his entire life. The entire world awaited him and whether he wanted to or not, he had to go and meet it.

Two Days Later

Albus Dumbledore didn't let his tiredness show as he walked through the Ministry of Magic, nodding jovially to the various witches and wizards going home that called out his name in greeting, a small smile on his face. The security guard straightened up at the sight of him and waved him through instantly and Albus bowed his head in thanks as he briskly walked up to one of the elevators and hopped in, pressing a button. As the doors closed with a loud, clanking noise and the elevator sped upwards, Albus let his smile disappear and the twinkle left his eyes. The situation had only worsened over the past two days and Albus was, mildly put, very tired.

A few minutes later, he strode into the office of the Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge. The portly man looked up from his desk and managed a tight smile as Albus closed the door behind him, flicking his wand several times as he secured the room against eavesdroppers. The instant he was done, he turned back to Fudge and took a seat, his expression grave.

“What have you learnt?” Fudge asked wearily, rubbing his eyes and shaking his head as he tried to dispel his tiredness.

“Both Muggle investigators and our own Auror forces have found no trace of Harry Potter’s body inside the house,” Albus answered seriously, his blue eyes solemn. “This leaves me to believe that Harry Potter was not inside the house when it was burnt down.”

“And you’re certain that this was an attack?” Fudge continued his questioning.

Albus nodded, his long beard quivering. “I am certain, Cornelius,” He answered gravely. “Although I cannot determine what spells were used, I know beyond any doubt that dark magic caused that fire. I also know that the bodies of the Dursley family showed obvious signs of trauma and violence before the fire. This was a premeditated attack on Harry Potter, and it appears to have been successful.”

“The Aurors have had no luck with their tracking spells,” Fudge said heavily. “I’ve ordered the search to be widened to include all of England, but without a registered wand, I don’t think we’ll find anything. Can you do anything with you devices?”

Albus shook his head. “Alas, I have tried and failed, yet Harry is being shielded by a spell or spells I have never seen the likes of before. I can state with certainty that Harry remains alive. However, beyond that, I know nothing more of his condition or location. Something powerful is hiding him.”

“Who could be doing this, Albus?” Fudge asked, worry in his voice as he leaned forward, resting his chin on his hands. “Is it Death Eater’s? Surely it isn’t You-Know-Who! I still don’t buy into your notion that he isn’t dead.”

"It is highly unlikely that Lord Voldemort is in any condition to pull off magic as advanced as this," Albus replied softly. "And while the culprits may be Death Eaters, I do not believe they are involved. All I can determine is that whatever is hiding him from us is far more powerful and ancient than either of us could possibly imagine."

"What could this thing be?" Fudge asked with a touch of fear in his voice. "And does it mean Potter harm?"

"I do not know in either case," Albus admitted. The two men sat together in silence, each pondering their own thoughts. Finally, Fudge spoke up, weariness evident in his voice.

"What do we do now?"

And to that, Albus had no answer.

At the same time, not too far away from the Ministry of Magic itself, a young and dirty boy dressed in ripped and ratty clothing sprinted down a dark street. Behind him, a balding man dressed in cheap suit chased after him, his eyes gleaming with perverse enjoyment and insanity as he panted much like a dog, lasciviously licking his greasy lips with expectation.

"C'mon little boy, let me show you how the big boys have fun!" He cried out loudly, not even bothering to lower his voice in the second-rate suburban street he was in.

Harry didn't look back at the man that was chasing and just kept running, his heart pounding in his chest as he sought to escape the freak that was after him. Adrenaline pumped through his veins and his muscles were on fire as he rounded a corner and continued sprinting down the next street. His eyes landed on a large oak tree, partially hidden in the shadows and he made his way to it, hoping desperately that he could hide behind it before the man came after him. As he ran to the tree, he felt a small and decidedly feminine presence in his mind, Meciél, and growled in anger and exhaustion.

“Go away!” He shouted angrily as he reached the tree and ducked behind it, crouching in the shadows. The presence obediently retreated from his mind as Harry gasped in huge gulps of air, fear coursing into him as he hid from the insane man. Harry felt a twinge of revulsion and shuddered as he recalled some of the other things the man had been saying on the three minute chase.

“I will never go away, little boy, not until I’ve had my taste of you!” The other man shouted from the other street, manic laughter bubbling in his voice. “Never!”

Harry couldn’t help himself and rolled his eyes, mentally scoffing at the insane man, and pulled himself deeper into the tree’s shadow, pressing himself up against the rough bark as he heard the loud, slapping footsteps of the man enter the street. He crouched there with baited breath and waited as the footsteps paused, readying himself to jump up and run again.

Suddenly Harry heard a loud curse and the sound of retreating footsteps. A second later, a car cruised by, its light illuminating the street and Harry took the chance to poke his head out from behind the tree. As the car went past, Harry looked for the man and smiled in relief when he couldn’t see him. His smile faded as he felt the searing power of the Fallen flowing through him and with a startled jerk, released the power instantly. The power faded at once but the faint smell of sulphur continued to fill his nostrils as he stood up and turned around, wincing at his sore muscles.

However, his aches and pain quickly became a secondary concern as Harry stared at the closest building with wide eyes. In front of him stood a small, battered but homely church made of white-painted timber. Paint was peeling at the walls and Harry could see that it was missing a few tiles, but it emanated a certain holiness that Harry instinctively shied away from. Deep in his mind, Meciél, for lack of a better word, moved restlessly at the sight.

Harry’s eyes swivelled downwards as he noticed movement. From a side door, an aging man with white hair and a kind face hobbled out of the church, clutching a white rubbish bag. Dressed in priestly robes, the man deposited the bag in the garbage bin and straightened up,

his eyes unconsciously scanning up and down the street. His eyes met Harry's and for a second, they stared at each other, the man showing faint surprise.

"You look cold, child, and hungry," He called out in a wavering voice. "Come in, come in, and I'll get you something hot to eat."

Harry licked his lips, clearly tempted at the notion at his first proper hot meal in two days. The closest thing he had had was a few leftover chips he had taken from a public bin the other night. As he made to move forward, Miciel's presence abruptly appeared and her voice appeared in his head, worried and cautious.

'Do not enter, beloved. By picking up my coin, you have changed. You are not entirely human anymore and there are objects in there that may harm you!'

Harry hesitated in his step, a worried frown appearing on his face as he regarded the church with more caution, his eyes narrowed carefully. He could feel the weight of the coin in his pocket as he tried to weigh his options.

"I mean you no harm, child," The priest called out again, and the kindness and warmth was obvious in his voice. "Everybody is welcome in God's house."

'Stay your ground, lest you are harmed!'

Harry frowned but made his decision and nodded decisively. As he moved forward, closer to the Church, he spoke to Miciel in his mind.

"You can't tell me what to do anymore, so just shut up!"

He winced when he felt her anger, ancient and powerful, but she complied with his wishes and retreated back into his mind as Harry approached the priest, who smiled encouragingly and led him past the main entrance and towards a side door. He gestured for Harry to enter and the green-eyed boy hesitated, before taking a deep breath and stepping into the small building.

The first things he noticed were the warm wooden walls, made of a beautiful light-shaded wood. His eyes took in his surroundings, noting the scratched and battered pews, the tiny crucifixes stapled up on the walls and the chipped statue of some saint in the corner. A small altar stood up on a raised platform and Harry, in his new status, could feel what most humans could not, the feelings of benevolence and holiness that literally radiated from the altar. He almost flinched as they struck him with full force, sending an odd and decidedly unpleasant sensation throughout his body. He was squirming and fidgeting on his feet as the priest led him away from the congregation area and into a small living area, away from the holy power and the unpleasant sensations. The priest gestured for Harry to sit down at the small table and Harry pulled out a chair, sinking into it with a small sigh as he finally rested his aching legs.

“So child, what is your name?” The priest asked kindly as he watched Harry shift in the couch, his eyes radiating his sympathy for the small child in front of him. The boy's face was covered in dirt and grime and his clothes were little better, stained in some kind of dark liquid that had completely ruined them. The boy's bright-green eyes reflected a gloom that the priest had only seen on some of the more bitter souls in the world.

“Harry,” Harry answered quietly, after a few seconds of silence.

“Well Harry, you really shouldn't be outside on such a cold night,” the priest said warmly. “You must be very cold. Let me go get you something hot to warm your bones. Afterwards, you are welcome to stay the night if you choose to do so.”

With another compassionate smile, the priest shuffled out of the room and a few seconds later, Harry could hear the clangs and crashes of pans and saucepans. As he sat in the small living room, resting his tired body on the extremely comfortable couch, Meciell made herself known as she created an illusion of herself in the room, eyeing Harry with a serious look on her face.

“Beloved, you must be careful here,” She said softly and quietly. “The Church is not safe for you. They have agents that hunt our kind down

and destroy them. They are not to be trusted, especially once they discover your true nature.”

“The Church knows about you?” Harry asked in surprise, although he kept his voice low as he quickly glanced at the kitchen door. But the priest was still busy and had just started humming a song, one Harry recognised as a bible hymn.

“Most of them do not,” Meciél answered softly, her silver eyes serious. “However, there is one organisation made up of three Knights chosen by the Arch-Angels themselves. These are the men you must be afraid of. They wield powerful swords, each crafted over the three nails that nailed Jesus Christ to the cross. These swords can cut through our most powerful enchantments and magic’s with ease. Beware the Knights of the Cross, beware the Fists of God, for they would destroy you if they had the chance!”

“You could be lying, trying to make me leave here. God is your enemy,” Harry accused softly, narrowing his eyes at Meciél, who shook her head, her long hair sweeping through the air and sparkling in the light.

“I cannot lie to you, beloved,” Meciél said, smiling slightly as she took a seat next to Harry, sitting close enough that he could feel the warmth radiating from her being as she continued talking. “I, like most immortal beings, are bound by the rules of the Old World. These rules compel us to keep our bargains and keep us from uttering falsehoods. Mortals, of course, are exempt from these rules, including you.”

Harry was silent for a second, before he turned to Meciél, a puzzled look on his young face. “You said “our kind”. Does that mean there are others...others like me? Maybe they can help me.”

Meciél lost her smile as panic flashed through her face. “No beloved, you must not!” She said quickly and firmly. At Harry’s inquisitive look, she continued, her voice never wavering. “You are correct, beloved, there are others like yourself. Twenty-nine of them, to be exact, although I am unsure of how many coins the Knights of the Cross have captured and locked away. They are the Order of the Blackened Denarius, the Black Knights, and they are more dangerous than the

Church could ever hope to be. They hate me, beloved. They were responsible for the death of my last host, the one whose screams you heard when you first encountered me. Seek no aid from them, beloved. Stay in the Church if you wish, but if you value your life, avoid the Black Denarians at all costs!”

Harry could only stare at Meciél in surprise, his brain trying to process all the information he had just learnt. It was at this moment the priest came back from the kitchen, a small smile on his face and a hot bowl of soup on a tray in his hands, and Harry's attention was quickly and easily diverted as he stared at the soup bowl with a hungry expression on his face. The priest placed it down in front of Harry and gave the boy a spoon, before he sat back, unknowingly walking through the illusion of Meciél and sitting himself down in a ratty armchair, watching Harry as he devoured his soup.

Harry was in paradise as the warm soup trickled down his throat, warming every part of his body. He slurped the soup down, only pausing to tear at a slice of bread on the tray, dip it into the soup and place it in his mouth. Meciél watched him, a slight expression of exasperation on her face at how easily his attention had been diverted from the more serious matters, and her illusion vanished from Harry's vision, although her presence remained at the forefront of his mind.

“So child, do you have a family?” The priest asked from his seat.

Harry continued eating his soup without pause but shook his head.

The priest frowned. “Do you have a home?”

Harry shook his head again, still intent on his food.

“Friends?” The priest tried again.

Harry shook his head one last time before he picked up the bowl and brought it to his lips, throwing his head back and gulping down the warm substance with relish.

"It's a sad world when a child is deprived of those three things," The priest mused, shaking his aged head sadly. "Still, as long as you know that God loves you, you will never be alone."

"God hates me," Harry mumbled through the last of his bread, which he was stuffing into his mouth as fast as he could, tearing into it in an animalistic fashion. "And I hate him."

The priest sighed, shaking his head. "That's not true, child," he said kindly. "God loves you and He always will. That is His nature."

Harry stared at the priest blankly as he swallowed the last of the food, clearly not believing what the old man was saying.

"It's sad to see a boy so young lose his faith and twice in the span of a few days," The priest mused softly. "I saw a boy who had similar feelings to you not two days ago, standing soaked and muddy outside a school as he threw away the symbol of his faith. I went over to help him, but he had already gone by the time I had gotten there."

To Harry's surprise and shock, the priest pulled out a small golden-coloured crucifix and placed it on the table, regarding it sadly. Harry's blood went cold as he regarded the symbol he had discarded just before he had met Meciél and his face went pale. The priest opened his mouth to say something else, but the phone suddenly rang, and the priest stood up from his chair.

"Just remember that God is the Eternal Shepherd and will always welcome back His Flock," The priest said quietly, before he left the room to answer the phone, leaving Harry to stare at his old crucifix in shock.

Harry knew that there was no way that this could be a coincidence. Transfixed, Harry got off the couch and dropped his knees, shuffling to the other end of the table, his eyes staring unblinkingly at the crucifix. Was this God's way of giving him, what, A second chance? Was this a way to repent for what he had done, for what he had become?

‘Do you see now, beloved? Do you see His true nature? He cares not of your pains, of your sufferings, of your thoughts and ideals, He only cares that you worship Him no longer.’ Meciél hissed softly in his head, bitterness twisting her voice into something ugly. ‘That is how He is, that is all He cares about, obedience.’

Harry wasn’t quite sure if Meciél was still talking about him anymore, but he still hesitated as he slowly raised his hand, which poised over the crucifix.

‘Don’t take it, beloved,’ Meciél warned quickly. ‘It is harmful to us.’

Harry ignored her words and, after taking a deep breath, lowered his hand and picked it up, or tried to pick it up, at least. The moment his skin came into contact with the crude metal, a burning pain shot up Harry’s palm and he gave a small cry of pain, jerking his hand back as he stared at the crucifix with disbelief. It had burned him! It had hurt him as if he were some kind of vampire or monster! He may have done something really horrible but didn’t the priests always say that God was always merciful? He stared at his hand, where a few wisps of smoke floated into the air, which Harry tracked with his eyes. This was how the priest found Harry, on his knees and staring at the roof. A small smile came over his face as he incorrectly assumed that the poor child was praying and he softly cleared his throat.

Harry started in surprise, his head whirling around as he jumped to his feet, his cheeks flaming up. He stared at the priest with a touch of fear as he fidgeted under the old man’s gaze. How much had he seen? Was the priest going to call those Knights of the Cross and get them to kill him? The priest, however, didn’t seem to notice Harry’s guilty manner.

“I apologise for interrupting you,” he said quietly. “But I must leave and give old Mrs Bowden her last rites. Please, feel free to stay here and rest for the night. All are welcome in God’s house.”

“I might stay,” Harry said quietly, not meeting the eyes of the priest. “I might not.”

“That is your decision,” The priest said just as quietly and picked up a thick coat that had been draped across the back of his chair. As he put it on, Harry spoke again.

“How do you know I won’t...I don’t know, rob you or something?” He asked in genuine puzzlement. “Why should you trust me?”

The priest frowned, as if the answer to Harry’s question was obvious. “Why should I distrust you, child, when you have done naught to me? We are all God’s children, child, and I extend to you the courtesy as I would treat any of my brothers and sisters.”

Harry didn’t say anything as the man gave one last smile and left. A few moments later, he heard the sound of an engine turning on as a car left the driveway, the noise fading as it left the church. Harry glanced around at his surroundings and frowned, hesitation on his face. Inside his mind, he could feel Meciél waiting for his choice, content to be patient. After a deep breath and a longing glance at the couch and something more comfortable than a brick wall, Harry started walking for the door. However, the glint of the crucifix lying on the table caught his eye and he hesitated. Eyeing a tissue box, Harry plucked out a tissue and approached the crucifix. Bracing himself for pain, he quickly but gently lifted the small object from the table and wrapped it around the tissue. He stared at the small bundle, indecision on his face, before stuffing it in his left pocket, the pocket without the coin, and leaving the room.

Outside, Harry shivered as the cool breeze penetrated his flimsy and shabby clothing, but he tried to ignore the cold as he picked a direction away from the church and started walking. In his head, Meciél stirred.

‘What will you do now, Beloved?’ She asked softly and kindly.

Harry didn’t answer her as he crossed the road, his small footsteps making a loud noise in the silent night. The clouds above him rumbled softly, threatening rain, but Harry didn’t seem to care as he kept walking. Finally, a minute later, he answered her out loud.

“You’ve changed me, Meciél, I can feel it.”” He said softly and without emotion. Meciél was silent. “And I like it. I like the feeling of power in me, I like being strong. But...”

‘I will teach you, beloved, I will show you how to become powerful. I will care for you, nourish you, and most importantly of all, I will love you. All you must do is embrace me. You’ve done it once before, do it again and let me help you.’

“You betrayed me,” Harry whispered, and the words of full of bitterness a seven-year-old shouldn’t have been able to manage.

‘No, I gave you what you wanted and you were simply unprepared. That does not have to happen again, beloved.’

“You were in control that night, not me,” Harry said angrily, his voice rising in the night. “You used me. You made me do what you wanted and don’t say I’m wrong, because you know I’m right.”

Meciél was silent as Harry turned a corner, but he stopped short and his eyes widened as the balding man who had been chasing him before appeared before him. The man blinked at Harry’s sudden appearance and a savage grin curved his lips as he advanced, his eyes roaming over Harry’s body.

“Hello little one,” He whispered menacingly. “I knew you’d be back.”

‘Do you wish to dispose of him, or shall we do what you usually do and run?’

Harry swallowed and his eyes wide as he took a step backwards from the advancing man. His legs were tired, his muscles ached, he was cold and he was scared. He was sick of being scared, sick of running away from the bullies that only tried to hurt him. He stuck both hands in his pockets, his left hand on the tissue-wrapped cloth and his right hand hovering above the coin, indecision roaring through his veins. Whatever item he chose, he knew that it would change his entire life. After brief moments of hesitation, he pulled both items out of his pockets, glanced at them for a brief second, closed his eyes and made his choice.

Something metal clinked to the ground as the man advanced, his hands outstretched as he prepared to grab Harry. Harry, who had had his head bowed, glanced up and met the man's eyes, his face calm and resolved. Suddenly a single sharp, ashen wing of bone burst from Harry's back, much like the skeletal wing of a bird, and shot forward. The man screamed in pain as it tore into his stomach, ripping through flesh, muscle and tendon with ease. The man gasped, gurgling madly as blood pooled at his mouth, his face set on stunned incomprehension. Harry let the dark power flow through his body and let his face transform into a cold smile. With a rough tug, Harry jerked his wing upwards, ripping up the man's chest. Dark blood poured down the bone as the man feebly struggled, some last vestige of life still left in him, before Harry, using the wing like an arm, swung the man around and slammed him into the nearest fence. Wood cracked and splintered as Harry hurled the man off his wing, sending him crumpling to the ground in a spray of crimson blood.

Breathing deeply, Harry stared at the mangled corpse and gently brought his wing in behind his back. Blood dripped from it as a slightly glowing illusion of Meciél appeared with a beautiful smile on her face. She opened her mouth to say something but Harry beat her to it, his face cold and his eyes burning with determination.

"You will teach me everything you know about magic and power," Harry said coldly. "You will help me become powerful and strong."

"If that is your command, beloved, then it shall be so," Meciél said quietly and subserviently with a slight bow of her head.

"And Meciél?" Harry added as he started walking away from the body. "I will never let you use me again. You will never manipulate me and control me like you do that first night. I'm in control and I'll always be in control."

Meciél hesitated and allowed a small smile to cross her face. "As you command, beloved," She murmured.

Together, boy and demon walked away, united and strong. Harry Potter had made his choice.

Neither of them noticed a small twinkle of light behind them as the crucifix reflected the nearby streetlight, glittering in the night sky as the blood from the torn and mangled corpse slowly began to envelop it.

Approximately one-and-a half-years later

Harry felt himself drift back into consciousness as he woke up. He gave a loud yawn, his eyes still closed as he snuggled himself deeper into the warm blankets, shifting around as he made himself comfortable. In the corner of his head, Meciél stirred as her presence blanketed his mind in familiar and welcome warmth.

‘I believe that it is time you awoke. Beloved,’

Harry gave a childish groan of protest and buried his head deeper into the covers. He stayed like this for a few seconds before he sighed loudly and sat up, rubbing his tired eyes sleepily as he scrambled out of bed. His bare feet hit the cold ground and he gave an abrupt cry of surprise, hopping up and down on his feet as he quickly put some socks on. Another yawn ripped through his mouth as he rubbed his eyes again, groggily glancing at his surroundings.

He was in a small apartment room, and a cheap one at that. The walls, painted in a murky yellow colour, were peeling with age. There were large water stains on the roof, evidence of a leaky pipe, and the floor was covered chipped and scratched floorboards. The single window in the room showed a faint mist of smog and pollution amongst the broad and flattened buildings of southern London. The room itself was a complete mess. Dirty clothes lay scattered on the floor, none of them Harry’s size. In the corner, there was a stack of empty pizza boxes and half-eaten microwave dinners and Harry wrinkled his nose in disgust, seeing a trail of ants marching from a small hole in the wall towards the stack.

“That’s gross,” He muttered childishly. He rubbed green eyes one last time and smoothed a hand through his messy hair. At that moment, he looked as adorable as any nine-year-old would have as he opened the bedroom door and left the messy room.

Harry entered a cramped living room. The first thing he noted was Meciél’s illusion leaning against a ratty couch, giving a warm smile as she folded her arms, watching him with a gaze that almost resembled affection.

“Good morning, beloved,” She said in her melodious voice. “I do hope you have rested well. We have a lot of work to do today.”

Harry smiled back through a yawn, his hand covering his mouth. “Morning Meciél,” He mumbled as he toddled through the cramped apartment, stepping over a coffee table and ducking to the side to avoid a large lamp. The middle of the living room had been covered with a clean, white bed sheet and everything had been moved away from it. Harry ignored this for the moment as his eyes found the small door leading to the kitchen and he made his way towards it, stepping over a lanky and bruised man who had been chained to the heater. Dried blood caked a small gash on his head as he stared at Harry in a mixture of confusion and fear, edging away from the small boy.

“Who are you talking to, man?” He asked, his voice scratchy and rough, as if he had been screaming all night.

Harry ignored him and entered the toilet, closing the door and leaving the man to gaze around the room, trying to find the source of this mysterious “Meciél”, the same person he had heard the kid speaking to last night when he burst through his door and, to the man’s shame, bludgeoned the living crap out of him with a cricket bat. But he couldn’t see anybody in his home and he turned his gaze back the toilet door, licking his lips nervously.

“C’món kid, let me out of these cuffs,” The man said desperately, his voice cracking as he tugged at his restraints. “My friends are coming to see me this morning and you don’t want to be here when they arrive, man. They’re the dangerous sort. C’món, no hard feelings or nothin’, I know you just needed a place to crash the night. It’s cold out there; I don’t blame you or hold any grudges. Just let me go.”

There was no answer and the man sighed noisily, slumping back against the very uncomfortable heater as he gazed at his cuffs, frowning again as he tugged at them. They appeared to be normal handcuffs but something had been scratched into them, some kind of weird language and symbols and stuff, and they were as hard as stone. The man tracked his eyes over the room, trying to find something to use to his advantage. The way out had been bolted and locked and strange symbols, akin to the ones on his cuffs, had been

scratched into the door. These same symbols had also been scratched in his bedroom door and on the windowpane, and the man briefly wondered if the kid was insane. Suddenly the toilet flushed and the door opened, the small boy exiting with ruffled hair. The man had to admit, the boy didn't look dangerous with his sleepy green eyes and his ruffled black hair. But he quickly changed his opinion when the boy directed his gaze at him and shuddered as he saw something beyond those apparently innocent features, a darkness that he shied away from.

"Your friends won't be able to open the door," Harry said coldly, regarding the man before him as if he were an insignificant insect. "I've seen to that. They won't be able to hear you either, just like nobody heard your screaming from last night. Your fate is entirely up to me, so I suggest that you shut your pathetic whiny mouth and try to be good."

The man swallowed and gaped at the words, which definitely sounded odd coming from such a young boy's mouth. But he did as he was told and held his tongue as the boy levelled a dangerous glare at him, shying away from those haunted emerald eyes.

"Oh, and I thought you might like to know," Harry continued, a cold smile curving his lips. "That young girl you raped, she'll be okay."

The man paled, his cheeks draining of blood as shock flooded his entire system. He licked his lips nervously, his eyes darting around frantically.

"W-What are you talking about, kid?" He said hoarsely.

The boy gazed at him flatly, not looking impressed at all. "Do you believe that it was random chance that I came bursting through your particular door and bashed the crap through you? Unless this isn't the first time something like this has happened to you, I mean, it would explain the rather...odd....shape of your face."

The man gaped at the sudden ruthlessness and mockery in the boy's voice, the familiar coils of anger stirring in his stomach.

“What did you say to me, you little bastard?” He snarled, seemingly forgetting his position as he rattled against the chains.

Harry blinked, an expression of mock-surprise and sympathy coming over face.

“Deaf and ugly, you really got the bad end of the stick here, didn't you?” He said, shaking his head in apparent sadness as he entered the adjoining kitchen, leaving the man gaping at his back as he sought something to eat. He started searching the cupboards but he found mostly dust and mouse dirt. The only thing that resembled a proper breakfast was an old can of spaghetti and Harry rolled his eyes in annoyance, grumbling under his breath.

“Is this all you have?” He demanded to the chained-up man, gesturing the can of spaghetti sitting on the bench. The man nodded and Harry sighed in disappointment, turning around and regarded the can petulantly, glaring at it as if it were its fault it was not tasty. With an irritable sigh, Harry raised his left hand and concentrated. Dark power flowed through him, just a few drops, and his ring, a crudely constructed piece of metal with a small gem set in the middle, flickered in an almost-invisible light. The air rippled as power flowed through it and the lid of spaghetti can was suddenly blasted off by an unseen force, flying through the air with great force and landing close to the chained man. The man looked from the lid towards Harry, his mouth open as if he couldn't believe what had just seen, but Harry ignored him as he started riffling through the drawers.

“Spoons, spoons, spoons,” Harry muttered under his breath. “Where the hell are all of the spoons?”

Finally, he pulled out a dirty spoon and wrinkled his nose at it, moving over to the tap and turning it on. But the water that spurted out wasn't clear, but red, as if rust had somehow gotten into the pipes, and Harry stared at it blankly before switching his gaze to the man.

“You're house is disgusting,” He remarked sourly, throwing away the spoon and checking the drawers bellow the sink. He plucked out a clean spoon and walked back to the living room. “I'd suggest that you clean it up, but it won't matter soon.”

The man puzzled over that statement as Harry dipped his spoon in the cold spaghetti and hesitated, biting his lip.

“Meciel, heat this up,” He said after a few seconds.

“As you wish, beloved,” Meciel said from her reclined position on the sofa and when Harry put the spoon to his lips, it had indeed been heated up.

Harry made a noise of appreciation as he ate, even though he knew that the spaghetti wasn't really hot. Rather, it was Meciel manipulating various parts of his nervous system and brain making him believe that the soup was hot, much like she did when she made herself 'appear' before him and 'speak' at him. She physically and magically wasn't really there; he just perceived that she was.

As he ate, Harry walked over to the centre of the room, ignoring his captor as he kicked back the large bed sheet covering the ground and revealed a large, scratchy circle that had been crudely and quickly carved into the wood. Rough runes had been scratched around it with something sharp and although it looked rather shabby and non-magical, it was more than enough for what Harry had planned.

“Where did that come from?” The man asked in surprise, his eyes flickering over the circle and nothing the runes.

“I made it last night, when you were...ah...asleep,” Harry said between mouthfuls, gulping down his breakfast.

The man frowned and made an odd noise of disgust, his eyes swivelling from the lid of the tin to the circle.

Under his breath, he muttered to himself, “He's some kind of freak or something.”

A normal human wouldn't have been able to hear that properly but Harry whirled around, his icy green eyes narrowing dangerously as anger washed over his face, anger that should have been far too

powerful for an ordinary child to muster. He raised his left hand and whipped it through the air, the ring glinting as he did, and the man gave a startled cry of pain as something powerful struck him across the face, lifting him up from his seated position. He would have gone sprawling over the ground but the cuffs yanked him back and he crashed into the heater. Blood pooled from his face as the man discovered a deep and nasty gash in his cheek and he glanced up from the ground, eyes wide with fear.

“You’re the freak here, not me,” Harry growled angrily, eyes dangerous as dark power seared into his veins, threatening to overwhelm him as they produced intense feelings of pleasure to his heightened rage. “You’re the one who rapes kids. You’ve done it six times, six!”

The man paled as Harry continued maliciously, his voice softening.

“And every time, just after you’ve finished, you go to your Church, kneel in a darkened corner and pray for His forgiveness, for His mercy. You promise that you’ll change, that you’ll become a better man, you’ll get off the drugs and do something meaningful with your life, but you don’t. After a few months have passed, you’re back on the drugs and you’re raping again. You never keep your promises and,” here Harry let out a sarcastic laugh as his face twisted in mockery. “I’ll admit, for a second there, I thought that perhaps he was really, really serious this time, but no...I saw what you did last night and I saw you praying like you usually do.”

The man ducked his head, squeezing his eyes shut as the Harry’s words seared into his brain, etching themselves onto every corner of his mind. A slow tear of shame rolled down his cheek as he took deep breaths, trying to find the strength to deny the accusations.

“Luckily, you’re just what I need,” Harry finished coldly, reigning in his anger as he turned back to the circle and threw away his breakfast, his appetite suddenly gone.

“W-What do y-you need me for?” The man stuttered, shivering in fear as he sat up again, thankful that the strange child’s anger had somewhat dissipated.

"You'll see," Harry promised darkly, his voice suddenly with darkness as he once again called the dark power to his veins.

He closed his eyes in ecstasy as the power washed through him, more pleasurable and desirable than anything else he had encountered. The power seared through him, the scent of sulphur and fire filling his nose as he called up Hellfire, the power source of the Fallen, allowing it to flow through him and offering it no resistance. In his mind, Meciél helped him guide the power from his body, showing him how to channel it into the magical circle. His eyes still closed, Harry began the ritual.

"Chaunzaggoroth, I summon thee! Chaunzaggoroth, I summon thee! Chaunzaggoroth, I summon thee!"

Harry could feel the power, his power, activating the magic circle. The circle shimmered as a cone of magic rose from the lines, a thick wall of powerful magical energies tinged in fire and darkness. The wall flickered as it set itself up, glowing softly in the relatively dark room, until it had enclosed the entire circle, leaving a small space within it to contain something. The ground within the circle suddenly started as if a powerful force were sucking it downward, black power bubbling and oozing as energies akin to thick, bubbly goo appeared. From this goo arose a creature, an animal of many and none. Crab-like pincers snapped back and forth, hard scales covered its humanoid body, from its chitinous shoulders to its clawed feet. Its head, much like a bird, had an avian beak, designed for ripping into flesh and its eyes were two burning coals, bright, terrible and burning with anger.

The moment it appeared, it let out a loud roar full bestial anger and rage. It made to move forward, its eyes fixating on Harry, its summoner, as it prepared to rip him to pieces. But the magical barrier shimmered with Hellfire and magic and the beast slammed against it and staggered back. It stood tall and strong as it ripped into the barrier with its pincers, blows that would have torn cars apart, while it slammed its spiked shoulders into it. But Harry kept his will in his spell and it held. The demon eventually lifted its head and let out another roar, this one of frustration and dissatisfaction as it stopped tearing at the barrier, its burning eyes meeting those of Harry's. Harry

swallowed at the gaze, suddenly feeling very afraid, but the warm, soothing presence of Meciél was there to reassure him.

‘Do not show it fear; it will use it against you.’ She whispered softly. ‘Remember what I told you and you shall prevail today.’

Harry made himself swallow and drew himself up, or as much as a nine-year old could, and prepared to confront the demon.

“Are you done? If I wanted to see a fake performance, I would have switched on the TV and turned the channel onto wrestling,” He said, allowing sarcasm and scorn to fill his voice.

The demon stopped thrashing and suddenly took on an elegant stance. One of the pincer-like claws reached behind a scale and pulled out a pair of half-moon glasses, plucking them on the end of his beak and peering down at the human child. When it spoke, a sophisticated oxford accent marked its rather smooth voice.

“There are formalities that must be taken into account, young Denarian,” It said scoldingly. “I must abide to the laws of the Old World, after all. I have a role to play, you understand?”

Harry rolled his eyes, irritation showing on his face as he regained his confidence.

“On another note, how is Meciél?” The demon asked politely. “I, of course, heard about the terrible slaying of her previous host.”

“Meciél is doing just fine,” Harry answered slowly, eyeing the demon strangely. “I summoned you here for a specific reason.”

“Ah, yes,” Chaunzaggoroth said and Harry blinked as its beak swivelled oddly with soft, crackling sounds. “We demons are, of course, the watchers of the mortal world and we do tend to garner substantial amounts of information. Is there something specific that you wanted to know?”

“I need to know the location of the sword used by Meciél’s previous...ah...host,” Harry finished.

The demon made a rumbling noise as it observed the young child in front of it. "There is, of course, a price for such knowledge."

"So I've been told," Harry deadpanned, his flickering over the chained man, who was watching the proceedings with a stunned expression on his face, his eyes wide and his mouth flapping up and down wordlessly. "I'd offer you my soul, but I think Meciél's already laid a claim to that."

"Indeed," Chaunzaggoroth said dryly, absently scratching under a scale with a pincer. "However, there are other things you can barter with, for example, your full name."

'Beware, beloved. Amongst the immortal's, names spoken from the lips of their owners are powerful tools.' Meciél cautioned quietly. 'Just as you summoned it with his true name, it can use your name to cast magic upon you. Never reveal your full name to anybody, even mortals, lest it is overheard.'

"Yeah, that's not going to happen," Harry disagreed quickly, having heard that lecture many times before. "I may not be able to give you my soul, but how about I let you take his?"

The demon followed Harry's arm as it swivelled around in its prison, his dark, burning eyes zooming in on the chained-up man, who whimpered softly as it examined him. After a moment or so, the demon turned back to Harry with, if Harry could interpret its expressions properly, displeasure.

"In spirit, he is already one of us," The demon hissed, its pleasant and composed demeanour gone. Its pincers clicked angrily as it continued, a low rumble building up beneath its scales. "We know of his behaviour! You cannot offer us what we are eventually going to receive! If you have summoned me here and are unprepared to offer something of substantial value..."

"He prays," Harry broke in quickly and although his face didn't show it, he was relieved when the demon paused, its anger dying down as curiosity overwrote it. "I know that you lot have problems gathering

information around churches and religious artefacts. Meciél was certain that you didn't know this."

"He prays, you say?" The demon murmured quietly, observing the shaking man carefully. "That is interesting news."

"He's a church-goer, a believer," Harry continued quietly, comforted that the demon's gaze had left him and by Meciél's warm presence in his mind, which spurred him on. "He wants to stop but he can't help himself. Every time he commits a rape, he cries and visits a church, seeking repentance and forgiveness in God's house, and you know how God is about mercy, forgiveness and atonement. One day, this man may enter a church, ask for forgiveness and receive it. You can take him and be certain that his soul is eternally yours, or you can wait and you might lose him forever."

Chaunzaggoroth considered its options and at last, swivelled its beak into what Harry thought was a smile. "I had thought it was odd that Meciél had chosen a host so young. But I now see why she has kept you. Very well, young Denarian, I accept the terms. Structure your question and I shall answer, for the agreed price of this Mathew's soul."

The man, Mathew apparently, suddenly twisted and flailed about in his bonds, his eyes open in horror as he struggled against the cuffs linking him to the heater.

"You can't do this!" He screamed loudly, tears falling down his cheeks as he pushed against his cuffs. "You can't barter me away like an animal and you...you...hideous freak, you can't have my soul! I won't let you take it! I demand that..."

Harry slashed his hand through the air, the ring on his finger glinting, and the man's sentence was cut off by a scream of pain as he was slapped aside by a powerful force yet again, held in place by his cuffs as his body was slammed into the ground. The man didn't get up again and Harry could hear low, sobbing sounds as he turned back to the demon, his eyes serious.

“My question is,” He began. “Who is in possession of the sword that Meciél’s previous host used no more than two-years ago, how did they get this sword and where might the sword and owner be located?”

“The sword is in possession of a Mr James Jordan. This man found and retrieved the sword from a tip five-hundred and twenty-three days, two hours, three minutes and seventeen seconds ago. Both the sword and owner are currently located in London, at a small pawnbroker.” Chaunzaggoroth said, its voice almost a monotone as he retrieved the information and relayed the address to Harry. “Now, may I have my prize?”

Harry nodded and ignoring the sudden pleas for mercy, knelt down and touched one of the roughly-carved runes on the ground. The instant he did, the circle of magical energies made of fire and shadow, suddenly emanated a soft, blue pulse. Harry quickly took a step backwards, dark fire burning into his veins as he watched the demon with unblinking eyes, his ring sparkling dangerously.

Normally, any physical object that passes through a magical circle would shatter the spell and allow the bound creature, whatever it was, to reign free. Although there were spells and other circles to prevent physical objects from reaching the circle, acting as a force field of sorts, they were currently beyond Harry’s level of knowledge. Instead, Harry had carved a rune that would allow physical objects to pass through the circle at the cost of considerably weakening the barrier. Even though Chaunzaggoroth had agreed to the terms and was bound by the Old World rules to honour his word, Harry wasn’t going to take any chances. Distantly in his mind, he felt Meciél murmur approvingly.

After Chaunzaggoroth made no attempt to break free, Harry waved his hand again, his ring glinting as it focussed the magical energies given to him by Meciél. The handcuffs holding Matthew in place suddenly clicked as they were unlocked. Mathew quickly slid his hand out of them and jumped up, his eyes wide with fright as he desperately made for the door. However, Harry curled his fingers and the man halted, pain sliding over his features. Another gesture of his arm and the ring flashed as the Matthew was yanked through the air,

away from the door and into the summoning circle, into the demons grasp. Harry quickly snapped his fingers and the pale blue glow disappeared as the circle returned to full strength while Chaunzaggoroth stared down at its prey, its pincers latching onto the man's shoulders, its fiery eyes glowing maliciously.

Harry waved his hand again and a backpack in the corner of the room flew into his hands, along with the discarded cuffs, which Harry promptly put in his pack and slung it over his shoulder. Scanning the room for anything else that might be useful, Harry turned back to the demon, which had somehow put Matthew under some kind of trance as the man had stopped his screaming and pleading and stood there with a blank look on his face.

"Goodbye demon," Harry said as he approached the door. "Mind the fire on the way out."

The demon cocked its avian-like head as Harry held out his palm, concentrating carefully as he called up his dark powers. The overpowering scent of sulphur filled the air as a ball of pure Hellfire burst into existence, flickering malevolently in the small room in hues of yellow and red. Harry tossed it into the air a couple of times, catching it with ease while Chaunzaggoroth let out a low laugh. After scanning the apartment one last time, Harry eyed the ball of searing flames he was holding, flames that had no effect on him, and hurled it at the battered television set. The ball of fire struck the electronic device and exploded with a loud rumbling roar, the fire quickly spreading to the rest of the room, eating away at the old couch and licking the wooden walls and floor. Heat seared into the room but Harry remained unaffected, while Chaunzaggoroth and the demon remained protected behind the barrier.

The demon watched as the small boy left the room and snorted, its avian-like beak clucking.

"It's a pity he didn't ask me why Mr James Jordan had the sword," It muttered, but soon turned its attention to its new prey.

Harry walked out into a shabby and dimly lit hallway and didn't flinch when a truly agonising scream emerged from the room and he quickly closed the door, not particularly wanting to hear a man get his

soul ripped from his body. As soon as the door closed, the scream cut off, a sign that the room was still magically sealed. But the brief scream had echoed down into the hallway and when Harry turned away from the door, he blinked in surprise as he saw a man just a metre away from him.

“Was that Mathew doing the fucking screaming?” The man demanded, his dark eyes glaring at Harry. “Who the fuck are you kid? Why the fuck, are you here? What’s all that fucking screaming about? Where the fuck has Mathew been? He was supposed to meet me two fucking hours ago! And...is that smoke?”

Harry didn’t move an inch as the man stared past him, looking at the thick billows of smoke coming in from under the door, but he started in surprise as the man reached into his cheap, brown jacket and pulled out a small handgun, a resolute expression on his face. Harry reacted without a second thought, demonic instinct taking over his logical thought patterns. The back of his shirt was suddenly torn to shreds as a sharp, ashen wing of pure bone shot out towards the man, spearing him in the throat. Blood sprayed in the walls as Harry glared on with luminescent eyes, one glowing and eerie green and one glowing bright silver, the same colour as Meciels’. The man gurgled, took his last breath and slumped on the bony wing as Harry sought to regain control of himself, dark power flaring through out his body. Finally, after a few moments, Harry threw the man off his wing and brought into his back, where it was sucked into his skin as if it had never existed.

For a second, Harry just stood there, staring at the dead body with blank eyes and a smoothed-over face. Finally, after thirty seconds of stillness, Harry slowly bent down and picked up the gleaming silver weapon, a revolver, and glanced at it. With a shrug, he pulled his backpack over his shoulder and placed the gun inside, before he eyed the dead body carefully. A year and a half ago, hell, six months ago Harry would have been agonising over what he had just done. Now, he knelt down and checked the man’s pockets, pulling out a slim wallet and flipping it open. He took the money and threw the wallet to the ground, before he stood up and without another glance at the body, walked down and out of the hallway.

Harry exited the building and stepped out into the damp streets of London. Large, angry clouds billowed in the sky and a chilling wind swept through the city, bringing with it a faint fog. It was a bleak day in the small, downtrodden area where the recently-deceased Mathew's apartment lay, and the pedestrians acted in the appropriate manner, skulking by with their heads down as they hurried to wherever they needed to be. Harry eyed the street up and down and frowned. There were no buses around this area and the address was at least a one-hour walk away. For a brief second, Harry wondered if he should call a taxi, but he suddenly spotted a man dressed in casual jeans and shirt approaching a car with a set of keys in hand.

'Ask him if he can give you a ride.' Meciell suggested. 'Politely, of course,'

Harry nodded and approached the man, putting on his 'child' face as he tugged on the man's sleeve, his green eyes wide and innocent as the man looked down at him.

"Excuse me sir," He said in a soft voice. "But could you give me a ride?"

"Do I look a taxi service to you? Scram, you little punk!" The man scoffed and turned away, putting his keys in the lock of his car.

Harry rolled his eyes and gritted his teeth, annoyance on his features, and after quickly glancing around to make sure that nobody was too close, he pulled out the large, silver revolver and levelled it at the man. The man looked up as he felt another tug on his jacket, but when he turned around to glare at the boy, his words died in his mouth as he noticed the silver barrel jutting towards him.

"Excuse me sir," Harry said mockingly, sweetness dripping from his voice. "But could you give me a ride?"

The man was frozen as he stared at the gun, his eyes wide with fear, but he composed himself and gave a tight, strained smile.

“Sure,” He said, still smiling through gritted teeth. “Where can I take you?”

Harry smiled coldly and didn't flinch when a large explosion ripped through the apartment building behind him, a window shattered as flames burst from it, licking away at the wet bricks with little success. In the car, the man was silent as he shifted gears and accelerated the car away from the parking space and the burning apartment. Harry watched as a fire-engine sped past from the opposite direction, its lights flashing as its siren wailed. The man tracked the vehicle in his rear-view mirror as it screeched to a halt outside the burning apartment building, which was giving off copious amounts of smoke, before he turned a corner.

“Take me straight to the address I gave you,” Harry threatened, gesturing with the revolver, which almost slipped out of his small hands.

The driver didn't say anything but gave a short jerk of his head and continued driving, while Harry settled back into the seat.

“There, Meciél,” He mentally grumbled. ‘Are you happy? We found your stupid sword.’

‘The sword is not stupid, beloved, but an artefact especially useful for those lacking natural talent in evocation magics,’

“So, is it like those wands you've been telling me about?”

‘In a way, although it does not function how your kinds wands function. Rather, it helps in the channelling and control of powerful magic without blowing yourself up, if I may be blunt.’

Harry frowned, shifting in his seat as the driver made a steep left turn and settling back in again.

‘I still don't get the difference between evocation and wand-magic.’

‘Evocation is the instantaneous use of magic and energy drawn from the environment, from the life of the mortal world. It is dangerous because it can be hard to control without proper focus. A wand-wizard uses his wand to make a spiritual connection to an outer world and channels it into this world. This magic is potent in many ways, but the average wand-wizard’s magic would be mostly ineffective against most spiritual and summoned beings.’

“Ah.”

You still don’t understand, do you, beloved?’

“No, but I’ll trust you on this one.”

‘That is good to hear, beloved. You will understand the differences when we acquire a wand. You are approaching the age when you start consciously channelling this outer magic. First, however...’

“The sword”

Harry stepped out of the car and as soon as his feet had hit the footpath, the driver took off, screeching away from the kerb. Harry watched him speed away with an amused smile before he focussed his attention past the walking pedestrians and onto the small, dingy building in front of him. Metal bars had been installed on both the main window and the large window in the door. On top of the door, there was a sign reading: PAWNBROKERS: WE BUY, WE SELL. Harry moved forward, dodging out of the way of the pedestrians and a particularly grumpy-looking dog, and opening the door.

He entered the store and the smell of dust and age hit his nostrils. Harry glanced around, trying to see if there were any swords lying about. There were shelves of old things, knick knacks of past times. In one of the corners, there was a shelf of bowls and ceramics and in the other, a tower of old newspapers and old magazines rose from the ground. Harry approached the counter, which was stacked with old, dusty books, as a wheezy, old man hobbled out of the backroom, a welcoming smile on his wrinkled face.

“Welcome,” He said hoarsely. “I am James Jordan, the owner of this establishment. How may I help you today?”

"I was told that you have a sword," Harry said bluntly, not beating around the bush. The old man blinked in surprise.

"Who told you that?"

"A little bird...of sorts," Harry replied after a moment's hesitation, slightly smiling at his own joke. "A very ugly bird, sure, but it's still a bird. It did have a beak."

The old man frowned in confusion, but shrugged it off as he smiled.

"You were told right then," He said wheezingly. He smiled and regarded Harry with a fond look, as if he were remembering his own childhood days. "Would you like to have a look at it, son?"

"Please," Harry agreed, and watched as the old man hobbled to one of the cupboards and reached up, pulling down a long, cardboard box and setting it down on the counter. The old man opened up the box, placing the lid aside, and with careful hands, lifted up a sword and scabbard that was at least half the size of Harry. Harry could only see the hilt, an ornately decorated piece of metal, but within his mind Miciel stirred.

'That is the sword we seek,' she said. 'Take it.'

"How much is it?" Harry asked, his eyes never leaving the sword.

The old man's smile faded as he placed the sword back in the box.

"It's not for sale, son," He said, his voice hoarse.

"Everything's for sale," Harry insisted, a small frown appearing on his face as he reached into his pocket and pulled out the wad of cash he had taken from the other man earlier.

"This isn't," The old man said, the humour in his voice gone as he placed the lid back on the box.

“Why not?” Harry asked in confusion. He didn’t particularly want to rob this old man if he could help it.

“For starters son, it’s illegal to sell weapons to children,” The old man began gently. “And secondly, I believe that this sword has properties never before seen in its kind. I am keeping this for my own collection.”

Harry frowned and threw the money down on the table, gesturing to it in an unspoken question.

“No, son, it’s not for sale,” The old man, his voice growing harder.

Harry nodded and sighed. It looked like he couldn’t help it. He reached into his pants and untucked the revolver, levelling it at the old man, who took a step backwards as he raised his hands, his eyes wide with astonishment.

“How about the sword for your life?” Harry asked quietly, reaching over and opening the box up.

“Sounds like a bargain to me,” the old man said faintly, eying the gun carefully as he took another step backwards, approaching the counter as Harry pulled the sword out of the box. The instant Harry’s eyes flickered away from the old shopkeeper, the man ducked behind the counter. Suddenly a loud, piercing wail filled the store as the alarms were set off and Harry growled in irritation as he moved forward, gun in his left hand and sword scabbard in his right. He stepped behind the counter and levelled the revolver at the old man, who was shaking as he crouched on the ground.

“Don’t kill me!” The wizened man said in a quavering voice. “I...I can show you another way out, away from the police!”

Harry hesitated and slowly nodded, making sure to keep the gun levelled at the man at all times. The old man stood up, wincing and clutching a hand on his ribs as he did so, and hobbled over to a side door beyond the counter,

"This leads into an alleyway," The old man began, his eyes showing his fear as they constantly darted back to the gun. "If you go left, was it left? Yes, left. Go left and it will take you to the next block."

"Thankyou," Harry said politely, before his face hardened and with all of his strength, whacked the old man across the head with the butt of the gun. The old man fell to the ground in a crumpled heap as Harry opened the door and stepped out into the back alley.

As soon as the door shut again, the old man stirred. His eyes snapped open and he picked himself up from the ground, showing none of the physical weaknesses he had been showing moments before. He regarded the side door with shrewd eyes and locked it, before he returned to the counter, picked up the phone and dialled a number.

"It's me," The old man said into the receiver, speaking loudly as the alarm continued to blare. "Yes, somebody has taken it.....no; it was a small child, a boy, maybe nine or ten. Yes, I sent him your way.....yes; I'm sure it's her, the kid was too cool and collected....."

The man listened as the other person at the end of the line said something and he laughed a dark and sinister chuckle that echoed in the small, dusty store.

"Yes, I'm sure Meciél is going to be very surprised..."

Harry was walking quickly down the alley, his eyes alert as the alarm continued to wail behind him, the sword clasped firmly in his right hand and the gun in his left. Suddenly, he stopped, his eyes narrowing as a woman appeared from the misty alley, blocking his way. Harry frowned, his eyes darting over the woman's form. She had long dark hair, perfectly combed, and dark eyes, which studied him as well as he studied her. Her face was a little too lean to be called beautiful but she was pretty, even to a young boy like Harry. She was wearing an ordinary blouse and skirt and stood there with a small smile of amusement on her face.

'Run, beloved!' Meciél hissed into his mind, her normally beautiful voice harsh with hatred and anger. 'Flee this place! This woman is

like you! She carries a Fallen! She is of the Order of the Black Denarius!’

Harry blinked and eyed the woman more warily, who licked her lips and opened her mouth, a dangerous smirk curving her lips.

“Hello Meciél, I do believe we still have some business to attend to.”

Harry stared at the demon-host in front of him, a watchful frown on his face. His right hand still clutched the sword scabbard while his left hand gripped the revolver, not quite aiming at the woman. The woman stood there, her poise relaxed and confident with a lazy smile curled her lips as she ran her a hand through her silky hair, her eyes raking over Harry's body and assessing him. The expression that briefly flickered over her face told Harry that she had found him lacking and a jolt of anger zapped in his gut, resolve firming on his face.

"Who are you?" Harry demanded quietly. Within his mind, Meciél seemed to be throbbing nervously as the woman laughed quietly, a husky chuckle that grated on Harry's nerves, sending shivers down his back.

"My name is Deirdre, Meciél," She answered, her voice thick with humour. "And I'm quite sure that we have met before."

"Deirdre, was it? My name is Harry," Harry responded and flashed a fake smile, mockery flittering through his face. "And do you know what? I really don't think we have met."

Deirdre blinked in surprise, slightly cocking her head as she regarded Harry with a pensieve frown. Her dark and burning eyes assessed him again, open curiosity on her face.

"Meciél is not in command?" She asked slowly and for a second, it seemed as if she were puzzled by something. "You are the host?"

"Yeah, I'm the host," Harry said dryly, but he kept his distance away from the woman, not moving any closer than he had to.

Deirdre allowed a slow smile to curve her lips, soft but decidedly dangerous. She regarded Harry with an intense expression, almost hungry in nature, before giving off another dark chuckle, the sound causing goosebumps to pop from his skin.

"So, the traitorous Meciél stands before me in the host of a weak and untrained body of a child and she hasn't even wrested control," She

said, laughter in her voice. The laughter died down as the humour faded, deadly intent settling on her face as she gazed at him coldly. "This should be easier than I thought."

'Look for opportunities to flee, beloved, for you are no match for her, not just yet,' Meciél whispered softly into his mind, caution in her soft voice. 'She has century's worth of experience and battle, and even the most modest talents can be supplemented by practise and knowledge.'

Harry knew that Meciél was right. While he had explored some of the uses for his power in the previous year-and-a-half, delving into summoning rituals, magical circles, basic evocation and knowledge of a wide array of supernatural beings, he knew that most of his potential lay in his wand-wizard heritage and unfortunately for Harry, he didn't have a wand.

'We're getting a wand after this, Meciél,' Harry thought quickly and felt Meciél pulse in acknowledgement, before he focussed back on Deirdre, who was smiling as if she knew that Harry had been conversing with Meciél.

"What will be easier than you thought?" Harry asked softly, watching the woman carefully, but she made no attempt to attack him just yet, content with the conversation as she idly raised her hand to her hair, unconsciously running her fingers through it.

"Why, the complete and utter annihilation of Meciél's host, and the banishment of her coin," Deirdre answered easily, a dark gaze of amusement in her eyes. She made a tutting sound, clucking her tongue as she wagged her finger at him. "You really shouldn't have chosen Meciél, boy."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't know that you lot had a shop where I could have traded her in for a newer model," Harry retorted sarcastically, but he allowed the first trickle of his demon-granted power to start flowing into him, an intense but pleasurable rush of darkness that warmed his entire body with a satisfying tingle.

Deirdre didn't seem to take offence at Harry's attitude towards her, rather, she merely looked amused at it as a slow smile crossed her face.

"My, despite your looks you certainly don't act like a child, do you?" She murmured softly.

"Meciel's a bad influence," Harry confided, shrugging his shoulders, but his grip on the gun never faltered and his continued channelling his power, tense and alert. "You know, being a demon and all."

"I can believe that," Deirdre said, nodding in understanding as she smiling, her eyes glazing over for a short second. "Drandruil can cause me to behave irrationally at times, but the perks in our partnership far outweigh the cons. Besides, some of the best times I've ever had in my life are when Drandruil was in control."

"Before you try to kill me, just what did Meciel do to make you guys so angry with her?" Harry asked the demonic woman in front of him, honest curiosity in his voice. "I mean, it's not like she couldn't have stolen your soul, because you don't have one anymore."

"She hasn't told you of her crimes against us?" Deirdre asked, ignoring the slight and blinked, startled at Harry's question.

"Actually, she has," Harry deadpanned sarcastically, rolling his eyes mockingly as a sardonic grin flittered onto his face. "I thought I'd ask just so I could make myself look stupid."

Deirdre lost her amused demeanour as annoyance flickered onto her face. She lowered her hand from her hair and flexed her fingers, as if she would have liked nothing more at that very moment than to pick him up and strangle him.

"This rebellious act of yours is getting old, boy," She said, irritation clouding her tone. "You'd do well to hand over the coin and just walk away."

"And you'd let me live?" Harry asked in disbelief and scorn, scepticism on his face. "Yeah, like I really believe that!"

“Of course I would. We just want Meciél,” Deirdre said, flashing him a brilliant and quite beautiful smile that seemed to urge Harry to trust her. But under the coldness of her eyes lay a burning passion, dark and hot, and Harry knew without a doubt that she was lying.

‘She lies, beloved, you mustn’t trust her. She will never let you live. It is not her way!’

‘Of course she lying, Meciél,’ Harry thought quickly. ‘And even if she wasn’t, I would never give you up.’

‘Then you must flee or fight, beloved, but remain cautious. She is a very powerful.’

Harry refocussed his attention, which had only been diverted for the split-second that the conversation had taken, on Deirdre, who had begun talking. Power throbbed in his body, a brilliant and violent cascade of power that Harry, after one-and-a-half years of tuition, had no troubles of keeping it under control.

“We can find uses for one such as you, even without a coin,” She was saying persuasively. “Who knows, I am certain that my father has a spare coin that he may grant you, should you serve him well. All you have to do is give up the coin and...”

It was at this moment that Harry directed the power within him, feeling it bubble up with demonic energy. The smell of pure, burning sulphur filled his nose as he dropped the sword scabbard and flicked his arm outwards, as if he were throwing something. From his extended hand came a searing ball of blazing Hellfire, which shot towards the other Fallen host. At the same time, his left hand rose as Harry levelled the revolver at Deirdre while Meciél showed him how to shoot. Psychologically, it could have been described as “a manipulation of the long-term memory, especially procedural memory, to create ‘false’ memories that allowed for unconscious, reflexive behaviours”, but all Harry noticed was that his left arm straightened out, his right foot moved back and he fired without hesitation.

Three loud cracks erupted from within the back alley as Deirdre threw her hands up into the air. Almost simultaneously, three holes suddenly appeared in her blouse and she gave a slight jerk. A small dark stain quickly spread from the holes as blood leaked onto her blouse but she remained standing as the fireball hurtled towards her. Suddenly the ball of Hellfire slammed into an invisible force no less than a metre away from her, disappearing in a small puff of flames and oily wisps of smoke, and for a second Harry could have sworn that he saw a faint luminescent circle of glowing green magic shimmer into view at the end of her outstretched hands but it quickly faded away.

Deirdre looked down at her blouse, her hands still outstretched, an expression of annoyance coming over her face as she saw the blood.

"I'll be honest with you, boy, and say that that hurt a little," She growled out. "But did you honestly think that three bullets would stop me? Bullets have no magic behind them, they have no power. It's just a physical reaction that can be easily healed by somebody of my power. It will take many more bullets than that to truly hurt me."

Five quicker, loud cracks blasted from the revolver as Harry fired again and again until there were no more bullets left. This time the bullets didn't strike against Deirdre but rather the same, faint protective shield, which made an odd chinking noise as it deflected the small pieces of metal, turning them into vapour.

"I am not some lower Denarian to be taken down by mortal tools," Deirdre continued harshly, a dark smile on her face. "So I'm afraid you're going to have to..."

She broke off as Harry dropped the gun to the ground and clutched the sword to his chest as he began to run towards her. For a moment, Deirdre looked as if she would laugh at the sight of a nine-year-old charging at her with an expression of childish anger on his face. But her amusement quickly faded and her eyes widened with shock as, within the span of no less than two seconds, Harry changed from human into demon.

The first thing that appeared was two ashen wings made entirely out of sharp, hard bone, which burst from Harry's back, looming up above

his head. His entire body suddenly shot up, growing from four foot four until he was towering seven foot. While this was happening, Harry's small arms suddenly lengthened and darkened in colour, bulky muscle hardening with scale as a set of thick, jagged claws sprouted from his long, thick fingers off his beefy, scaly hands. The legs thickened and grew as well, clothes disappearing as bulky muscles covered in glinting dark scales appeared. Pale, five-toed feet morphed into dark, four-clawed feet as the shoes were seemingly sucked into his body. Harry's chest expanded and rippled with powerful energies, bulking up with muscle as a hard shell formed around his shoulders and dipped down to his waist, coating his vital organs and solidifying into a thick, strong bone-armoured plate. A tail jutted out from his back, a thick and powerful appendage covered in armoured-bone that whipped lazily through the air. His head transformed, his mouth extending out into a small snout and his nostrils expanding into tall, thin slits. His hair clumped together and flattened as it was transformed into tiny ridges of hard bones, useful for head butting foes. Finally, his eyes changed last. Two sets of eyes appeared on his terrifying face, one set glowing eerie green, the other glowing luminescent silver, while a dark blood-red sigil appeared on his forehead, the same sigil that had been engraved on Meciél's coin.

"Bone wrym!" Deirdre hissed, her eyes wide as the wrym roared, a powerful, bestial roar, and continued its charge. Its loud footsteps slammed into the ground, which shuddered in the narrow alleyway. Her face twisted into anger and she let out a wordless snarl, taking a step backwards and, like Harry, changed. Her skin shimmered as it transformed into rows of metallic green scales and her leg's made loud cracking noises as they distorted, becoming oddly hinged, back-jointed, very similar to those of a lion. Her arms extended and her ring finger merged with her pinkie as her hands sprouted metallic claws, gleaming and sharp. Two sets of eyes appeared on her face, which remained mostly human, one set bright green, the other glowing cherry-red. It was her hair that changed the most, growing out at a fantastical rate until it had lengthened to about fifteen feet, swaying and bobbing as it moved. Each strand lightened into a light-grey metallic strand until it appeared that it had been cut into one-inch strips from half a mile of sheet metal. The hair writhed around her like

a cloud of living serpents, metallic strands thrusting into the ground, supporting her weight like a dozen additional limbs.

Deirdre spat and hissed loudly in fury, her eyes reflecting her demonic rage, the same rage that was reflected in Harry's as he continued his charge, and the two powerful creatures of hell slammed into each other, meeting in battle.

When the two charging demons were close to each other, Harry brought up his ashen wings and thrust them downwards, trying to impale her on the sharp bone. Deirdre hissed loudly, coiling her back-jointed legs and jumping backwards. She must have had incredible strength in her legs because she soared through the air, landing on the ground gracefully no less than seven metres away. But Harry had started moving before she had even landed and he closed the distance quickly, his two sets of eyes glowing with rage and bloodlust as he let out a terrifying screech, lifting his thick, armoured tail and swiping it at Deirdre. The thick tail tore through the surrounding walls, tearing through bricks like they were newspapers as it brought it down on Deirdre, who dodged it gracefully as she sidestepped. The tail struck the ground with great force, cracking the asphalt with a loud rumble and when Harry brought the tail out of the ground, he left behind a small but deep crater. Harry used his sharp wings again, stabbing them at Deirdre, but the Fallen woman had had enough of being on the defensive and her hair writhed around her. Dozens out of the hundreds of strands of her new metallic-like hair shot up, flicking around various parts of both Harry's wings, latching onto them and halting them in their tracks.

Harry snarled, a sound promising great pain, baring his gleaming, sharp teeth as he strained against the iron grip of Deirdre's hair. His bony wings quivered as they pressed forward with all of their strength but Deirdre seemed to be too strong and didn't budge, a vicious smirk on her green metallic face, her eyes flashing with dark power. With another low snarl, Harry flung his tail out from behind him and swept it to the side, intending to bowl Deirdre off her feet. But the long-haired woman moved quickly and dozens more strands of metallic hair shot forward, whizzing through the air with an odd whistling noise as they sawed into armoured bone, wrapping themselves around the large appendage and stopping the anticipated blow. The tail strained against the bindings, Harry thrashing on his feet as he tugged and

pulled with all of his might, but Deirdre merely smirked and lashed out, a dozen metallic ribbons of writhing hair lashed across the alley. They slammed into his chest with far more power than Harry expected and he roared with pain as he felt the strength behind the blows, each individual strand striking him like a sledgehammer. Small cracks appeared in the shell-like armour covering his chest as Deirdre continued pummelling him, restraining him where he stood with her grip on his tail and wings, while Harry flailed around uselessly, swiping his clawed hands through the air as he desperately tried to reach her.

‘Beloved, you must listen to me. You must stop fighting and pull away when the time is right!’

Harry snarled, his teeth gnashing against each other, but the rage and anger that usually accompanied his demonic form was temporarily washed away by the sound of Meciél’s soothing voice and as Deirdre readied another volley of blows, he abruptly went limp. The binds went lax for a single instant before Harry was pushed back as the full force of Deirdre’s strength pushed against him. As he staggered back, he growled and with all of his strength, strained against the bonds and tore free, metallic strands unwrapped themselves from his wings and tail. Deirdre stumbled forward, startled, but rage washed over her features as she righted herself, while Harry stepped back, aware of a dim sense of caution behind his fury.

‘No, beloved, you must step forward, you must get in close. Deirdre has the advantage of range! You must eliminate it!’

Harry let out a loud, brutish roar and surged forward, his feet slamming into the ground and causing the nearby trash-cans to rattle and clatter. It only took a few steps to close the distance between the two hosts, before Harry was upon his enemy. He leaned back and threw his entire weight behind a mighty punch, his fist rocketing through the air. Deirdre’s hair whipped up in a blink of an eye, metallic strips slotting into each other and combining to form what seemed like a thick, sheet of metal. Harry’s large, meaty fist slammed into this sheet of metal and although the sheer power of it forced Deirdre to take a step backwards, the gleaming metallic shield easily deflected the blow, and several others as Harry lashed out in a flurry

of fists, claws ripping into brick walls as his swings went wide or bounced off the shield. Finally, after a powerful overhead blow connected to the shield, Deirdre staggered back as it collapsed, shrieking in pain as a few of her metallic strands of hair shattered in a sprinkling of metal. She coiled her legs and once again jumped further into the alley, her hair lashing out as she soared through the air. Harry bellowed as a few of them struck him but most of them zoomed past him and struck the ground before him, driving into it as if they were high-powered drills and punching deep holes into the concrete.

Deirdre landed nimbly on the ground, a little over ten metres away from Harry, who immediately charged for her. The ground shuddered and Deirdre waited until Harry was in range before she lashed out with her hair, thin strips striking at him like multiple whips. But Harry continued charging, swiping at the air furiously as he tried to bat away the metallic strands, and lowered his head, the ridges of hard bone levelled for Deirdre. With a loud bellow of anger, he reared his head back and slammed it forward at the other woman. But Deirdre nimbly ducked aside, moving forward as Harry charged past her, his momentum carrying him into the wall, which shuddered as Harry head butted it. Bricks were cracked and many crumbled to the ground from a large dent as Harry took a step backwards, a billow of dust and mortar in his face.

Deidre, who was behind Harry now, didn't even turn around as her hair fanned around her shoulders for a brief instant, before it lanced towards Harry, striking his exposed back furiously. Harry roared in pain and with a great, sweeping movement, he swung his tail around blindly, trying to strike at Deidre. He was successful as his armoured tail slammed into Deidre's midsection and sent her flying across the alley and sprawling on the ground as she landed with a loud thud. But the demon woman was quick to get back on her feet, her hair driving into the ground as it lifted her up, while Harry managed to turn around in the narrow alley, his tail tearing through more bricks.

He had turned around just in time to see Deidre's hair lash out at him like dozens of silvery whips, gouging into the armoured plate in his torso and tearing into some of the sensitive flesh on his head. Harry snarled in pain, his four eyes gleaming with rage, and his claws

frantically swiping through the air. For once, they found something and Deirdre shrieked in pain as a handful of her hair was torn apart, instantly dissolving into a wisp of dirty, black smoke. Harry's next swipe took advantage of her distraction and another five or six of her strands shattered away into nothingness as he claws ripped right through them.

Deirdre let out a loud, high-pitched cry of pain and fury, her four eyes flashing with dark, searing power as she coiled her legs and jumped forward, soaring gracefully through the air and landing no less than a metre away from Harry, who swiped at her with his thick tail. He missed, the tail tearing through the ground, leaving behind a large gouge, while his ashen wings of bone stabbed at her. He missed, Deirdre twisting and weaving to avoid them, and they drove into the concrete as Deirdre's hair rose up around her. The dozens of individual metallic strands formed together, slotting in with each other much like they had done with the shield, but this time they formed a crude and rough representation of a pick-axe, or a scythe. With a spitting hiss of anger, Deirdre lashed out with her new weapon.

'Block it, beloved! She has woven a powerful spell into her hair! Should it strike your chest, it will penetrate!'

Harry spun around, bringing his armoured tail up to coil around his head, and gave an inhuman grunt as the two appendages collided. Dark sparks flickered wildly as the axe scraped against the tail, trying to force its way past it to remove Harry's bestial head. The axe retreated as Harry took a stumbled step backwards, moving his wings of bone forward and deflecting the next strike, more purple and black sparks lighting up the air.

Deirdre hissed and step backwards, her hair breaking up and fanning around her as she bared her sharp, glinting teeth at him. Her hair was wildly spinning above her head, strands twisting and spinning around four thick clumps, wrapping around them as they formed into something vaguely resembling swords. Metal hissed and scratched as the swords spun through the air, Deirdre launching a flurry of powerful strikes on Harry, who brought up his ashen wings. Sword clashed upon bone, purple and black sparks flying through the air as Harry staggered backwards, Deidre's onslaught completely

overwhelming him. Deidre let out a hiss of pleasure, darting forward nimbly and evading Harry's fierce rakes with his claws, circling him and continuing her assault on his battered wings.

Sparks continued to fly through the air, illuminating the area in hues of dark purple and Deirdre continued to circle around Harry, her hair lashing out with powerful blows. Sadistic pleasure illuminated her face as she chipped away at the great bone wrym's strength, until Harry, feebly lashing out with his claw, sliced through an entire sword by nothing more than luck. Deirdre let out a terrible scream of agony, her high-pitch voice reaching the point of painful as oily, black, smoke, smelling something like black tar, rose from her wound. She staggered back, her hair losing form as Harry righted himself and saw a moment of opportunity. Deirdre, whose hair was now spinning and twisting around to form something that resembled a thin, jagged spear, had left herself momentarily exposed and Harry, angered by both his pain and the demonic rage granted/cursed with his form, lunged for it with wings and arms.

'No! It is a feint!!'

But Harry had already gone for it, his mind too clouded with the pleasure and wrath that only black magic could bring, his wings lancing forward. Deirdre nimbly dodged, as if it had been her intention all of the time, and Harry then realised his mistake as the glittering metallic spear of long, sharpened hair slammed down and into his chest. The blow shattered the armoured shell and plunged into his body, digging into his now-vulnerable flesh, piercing his monstrous organs and shattering a small part of his armoured back as it pierced its way out of his body. Harry, who had thought he had felt pain before, screamed out in agony, his voice human rather than demon, while Deirdre shuddered in pleasure, her eyes dark with satisfaction as the spear sunk into her foe's body. However, the momentum of Harry's charge carried on with him and with a mighty blow of fury, lashed out with his bulging scaled arm. The blow caught Deirdre with the force of a tank, slugging her across the face and lifting her off her feet. She let out a rather un-demon squeal as she flew away from Harry, her spear sliding out of Harry's chest as the woman soared over two dozen metres, landing in a crumpled heap at the other end of the alley.

Instead of taking advantage of his foes present weakness, Harry staggered back on his mighty legs, his body suddenly feeling weak. Something burned within him, something foreign and extremely painful as it ate away at his strength, his vitality, his power. He shook his head blearily, his mind suddenly confused and disorientated. A thousand sparks of bright light flashed in his vision and suddenly Harry couldn't hear anything, not the wind or his own breathing. Although Harry didn't know it, the fierce glow of his green set of eyes was fading as something spread throughout his entire demonic form, weakening him and eating away at him. In a distant corner of his mind, Meciél spoke, urgency and panic in her voice.

'You have been poisoned with powerful black magic! You must run, beloved! You must change back! This poison will kill you in this body! Run!'

Harry blinked, a soft growl emerging from his lips as he smelt his enemy, seeing her rise up from the other end of the alley, blood pooling around her face. He made a motion to step towards her, his mind clouded with disorientation and a powerful wrath, but Meciél spoke again, her voice pleading with him as the burning in his veins worsened.

'You will die within minutes if you don't change! Run, beloved, I beg of you! Run and survive! Fight and die! Please, beloved, run!'

The words slammed into Harry's brain, temporarily driving his dizziness and anger, and with one last look at Deirdre, who eyed him with burning hatred, he quickly turned around and staggered away as fast as he could. His footsteps made loud, rumbling noises as he approached a corner and quickly glanced past it. He could see a busy street, full of humans, and with extreme concentration, he allowed himself to turn back into a human being. The dark power that had been flowing through his veins faded away as his senses dulled. Distantly, he could feel himself changing, losing nerve endings as tail and wing retreated into his body, losing his unnatural strength as muscles weakened and faded, but the disorientation and powerful burning sensation, which did lessen, did not disappear entirely. Finally, Harry was completely human, shivering and weak. His left

hand still clutched the revolver, which he tucked into his pants, hiding it under his shirt, the right the sword scabbard. With stumbling steps, Harry proceeded forward at the end of alleyway and stepped into a London street.

The street was busy, packed with honking cars and multitudes of walking pedestrians. There were a few people gathered around the end of the alleyway, staring down into it, and Harry concluded with a dazed mind that they had heard the sounds of battle. Indeed, many of them seemed both frightened and curious, but one look at Harry and his grim, wild face and they let him pass silently. Harry gazed up and down the street, mind whirling as he staggered away from the alley, past the uncaring pedestrians as they scurried to their jobs. The burning in his veins was getting worse and when Harry looked down, he could see that blood was slowly staining his shirt, right where the spear had pierced him in his demonic form, and fear flittered past the dizziness and disorientation.

‘There, beloved! There is a man getting out of a taxi! Take that, and quickly!’

Harry quickly staggered forward, approaching the taxi as he saw the well-dressed man pay the driver, and limped his way up to the black taxi as the well-dressed man walked off. His veins were on fire, there was something hot, far different from his power, burning into his veins like acid, and his pain must have shown on his face as stumbled into the taxi, dropping the sword to the ground, because the driver peered into his mirror and frowned.

“You okay, kid?” The man, a small-bearded man with blue eyes, asked in concern. “You don’t look so hot?”

“I’m fine,” Harry said and reached into his pocket, pulling out a fifty-pound note and clumsily threw it at the driver, who snatched it from the air and nodded with a look of scepticism on his face as he turned around, placing the note in his money tray and clicking down the metre.

“Drug-users sure are getting younger these days,” He muttered, before he raised his voice and spoke in a slow, loud voice, as if Harry

were hard on hearing. "Where would you like me to take you?" The driver accentuated carefully.

'I can heal your wounds, beloved, and help you counter this spell,' Meciél said softly. 'But you need to find a place to rest, somewhere where you will not be disturbed. Perhaps, a motel'

"Hey, kid! Where to?" The driver demanded impatiently, tapping his fingers on the driving wheel in irritation. "I don't have all day here. Get off your high and give me some directions!"

"A motel," Harry said between soft, pained gasps. "A cheap motel, anywhere away from here."

"Are you going to be more specific than that?" The driver demanded and when he received no answer, he let out a tired sigh. "Look, whatever. I know of cheap-arse motel, but it's a bit of a fair ride. Your fifty should cover it though."

"That's alright," Harry grunted, trying to keep the pain from his voice as it intensified. What had started as a slow burning sensation had quickly blossomed into a raging inferno of agony, centring in his chest. He closed his eyes, tears building up as he gripped the sides of his seat, gritting his teeth. "Just go!"

As Harry felt the taxi begin to move, he gave an audible sigh in relief and leaned back into the chair, not needing to open his eyes to know that the illusion of Meciél sat next to him as her warmth began to spread to his pain-wracked body, comforting him as a tear slipped down his cheek.

Deirdre walked out of the alley, her stride angry and quick. She was completely human once more but darkness shone in her furious eyes as she scanned up and down the street, ignoring the small trickle of blood that was dripping from her nose as she sought out the child-host of Meciél. Her gaze went from the hundreds of people walking through the street to the dozens of black-coloured taxis, to the entrances of the various buildings and shops, and a scowl appeared on her face. She whirled around, the vicious snarl on her face sending several people scurrying away from her as she stalked back into the alley and disappeared into its shadows.

Later on, Harry would claim that he couldn't remember much of the following hours. His main memories were of an intense heat and fever, but he distantly recalled stumbling out of the taxi, the sword scabbard clutched in his hand as he gazed up at a small, paint-peeled sign that proclaimed 'MOTEL', and there was a vaguely memory of entering an dingy office, where a man lay back in his chair, fixated on the television. He remembered feeling his mouth asking for a room for the week in a very calm and detached manner and his hands moving to put down some money. The man had looked at money and went straight back to the television as he threw Harry a key, that Harry's arm caught with ease.

The next thing he remembered was entering a dark and blessedly cool room. There were flashes of quick memories of his hands scratching runes into the door and windows, most of them unknown to him. He distinctly remembered channelling his magic, the power rushing through him feeling insignificant next to the acidic poison in his veins, and then he was in bed, sweating and shivering as Meciél's illusion hovered above him, concern in her eyes.

"You did well today, beloved," She said quietly, watching him with soft silver eyes. "You retrieved sword and survived a battle with a much, more experienced opponent. I am very proud of you."

"It hurts," Harry whimpered, much like the child he should have been, and a flash of empathetic pain flickered over Meciél's face, the Fallen angel showing more emotion and concern that Harry ever recalled her showing before.

"Go to sleep, beloved," She whispered soothingly. "I will make it better."

Harry closed his weary emerald eyes, feeling Meciél stroking his sweaty forehead with hands, each stroke lulling him closer to sleep as it brought an icy tingle that swept through his body. The pain in his body faded away as the blazing inferno in his veins were washed aside by Meciél's warm glow, which invaded him like water sweeping through a fire and with a gentle sight, he fell asleep, relief clear on his face.

The illusion of Meciél watched him for a moment, her hand still stroking his sweaty and tangled hair, and for a moment, true affection and fondness appeared on her face before the illusion disappeared from Harry's unconscious perception as she started to combat the terrible poison in Harry's veins.

He would survive this.

One week later

The body of nine-year old Harry Potter lay on a damp, grimy bed, his green eyes glazed over as they stared off into space. Perspiration covered his body, his shirt soaked in his own sweat as a small, pained moan escaped his lips, his chest rising and falling in short, rapid movements. Suddenly he shot up, his eyes blinking rapidly as he gasped in exhaustion, before he groaned in pain and clutched his stomach. He looked down, a grimace of pain on his face as he slowly removed his hand, and traced his fingers around his injury. There was a new set of raw and still very painful scar tissue around his stomach just left of his navel, a testament to the power Deirdre wielded in that not even Meciél had been able to completely regenerate it instantaneously.

For the past week, Harry had only ventured away from the motel room once to pay for an extra few days, preferring to spend most of his time in the warded room as he recovered from the black magic that Deirdre had poured into her blow. If the motel manager had known that the runes and wards that Meciél, using Harry's body, had set up had blown out every single electrical item in the room then he would have demanded much more money from them. But the manager was unaware that Harry was magical and that all magic in general, even wand-magic in large enough quantities, completely disrupted and short-circuited electronic items. Hell, the manager probably didn't even believe in magic.

Still, it meant that Harry had been couped up in a small room for seven days with no television to watch and with orders from Meciél to keep the magic-casting to a minimum, in case Deirdre and whoever else was working for her was able to sense it despite the wards. Still, it hadn't been all bad. Meciél had been teaching him sword fighting over the course of the days, carefully implanting instincts, methods and skills, of some of her previous hosts into his mind. The worse part of it was that he could feel the emotions behind the various instincts and skill. Generally it was a blur of feelings, usually of excitement, enjoyment but fear and pain played a prominent role as well, and these feelings were enough to make Harry feel as if he had been fighting and training himself. After four days, his muscles were aching and his mind was quickly developing a splitting pain.

‘Are you paying attention, beloved?’

“Yes, Meciél,” Harry said as he rolled his eyes, grimacing and laying back down on the bed. “The stuff you just put into my mind hurt.”

‘Yes, I imagine that it would have. That was one of my previous hosts losing both the duel and his head,’ Meciél responded, her voice tinged with amusement.

“Ah, because it’s so important that I learn how to get my head cut off,” Harry muttered darkly, rubbing his forehead with his arm and wiping the sweat away with his arm. “Hey, Meciél, can all of the Fallen do this with their hosts?”

‘To a degree, yes,’ Meciél answered from within his mind. ‘However, only the skills of the previous hosts may be assimilated in such a fashion. You have to remember that some of the Denarians are quite old and some of the Fallen have been using the same host for almost 2000 years at a time. Still, this is why the Fallen are so formidable for no matter how many of our hosts are killed, so long as our coin is picked up, the next host can become just as dangerous.’

Harry nodded thoughtfully as he idly traced his fingers around his scar again. Suddenly a frown came over his face as something occurred to him and he scratched his head in puzzlement.

“What about wand-magic?” He asked slowly. “Have you ever had a wand-wizard as a host before?”

‘No, beloved, I have not.’

“Then how are you going to teach me wand-magic?” Harry asked in puzzlement, frowning as he awaited Meciél’s answer.

‘Remember, beloved, that while our movements in the void where He banished us are limited, they are not totally restricted. Occasionally we Fallen are able to communicate with each other. Not long ago, I was able to acquire a great deal of information off one of my brethren who has taken two or three wand-wizards on as hosts. Sadly, in his

imprisonment, he has gone quite insane and was unable to demand any payment.'

"Go Meciél," Harry murmured as he felt the smugness Meciél was radiating within his mind. "So, we can get a wand now?"

'Yes, beloved. The knowledge I gained, presuming that nothing has changed within the last sixty years, includes the location of the largest wand-wizard shopping alley in this nation, and the entrance can be found here in London.'

"So, we could go today, if I really wanted to," Harry said slowly as a small rush of anticipation struck him, and he sat up in his bed, using Meciél's influence on his body to ignore the pain in his stomach.

"Yes, beloved,' Meciél said wryly. 'Of course, we must be cautious, especially with that distinctive scar of yours. You know of your past and of your status in the wand-wizard world. I have no doubt that your disappearance from the Dursley's and their well-deserved fate did not go unnoticed. There will be people searching for you.'

Harry nodded, having learnt of his past quite some time ago. Such information had been easily bartered for from the first lesser demons he had summoned under Meciél's tutelage. He knew that if the wand-wizards captured him, they would eventually discover Meciél and take her away from him. Besides, Meciél's descriptions of the a large, formidable magical prison guarded by powerful lesser demons known as Dementors had spooked him more than he'd like to admit He knew that he had traded his soul for power, for strength, for protection, but that didn't mean he wanted something to try to suck it out of him. He was shaken out of his thoughts as Meciél continued speaking, as if she were oblivious to what he was thinking, but Harry knew better.

'Your greatest strength lies in wand-magic and although it is weaker than evocation and thaumaturgy, in the hands of a skilled user, it is an extremely powerful weapon. It is much quicker than thaumaturgy, ritual magic and even evocation. Unlike evocation, the incantations are not necessarily required to be verbal and with practise, mental incantations can produce the same results as a verbal incantation.

Wand-magic can also be used for a wide array of uses that a skilled True Wizard would not be able to perform.'

"I still don't get the difference between a True Wizard and a Wand-Wizard," Harry said, wincing as he got out of his sweaty and dirty bed. He walked across the room and entered the small adjoining bathroom, sticking a hand in the shower and turning on the cold water – there had been no hot water ever since Harry had entered the apartment and the water-heater had mysteriously stopped working. As he did this, Meciél continued to explain in a very patient tone, as if she had been over this numerous times before.

'A True Wizard is a wizard who draws his magic from this world, this planet. He draws it from the ocean, the grass, the trees, the animals and even human beings. Essentially, he is tapping into the energy of creation and using it for his own purposes. Evocation is the quick drawing and release of this magic and tends to very volatile and explosive. Thaumaturgy is the complete opposite of evocation and requires patience and a methodical approach to the spell or ritual. This is when a True Wizard slowly gathers the energy over a period of time and releases it all at once. Generally, spells cast using thaumaturgy are much more powerful than spells cast using evocation.'

'However, a wand-wizard doesn't draw his energy from this world. Rather, wand-wizards use their wands to draw in energy from an outside source, a plane of existence entirely made up of their magic. They channel this energy from this plane, using their wands, and shape it in their minds before releasing it. It is a weaker source of magic, yes, but far less volatile and raw than True Magic. Wand Magic is your scalpel to their broadsword. A broadsword can hack a man in half with little effort, but a quick scalpel can slice the throat of a man before he knows what happened, and either way, the man ends up dead.'

"Wasn't that a nice example," Harry muttered as he looked at the shower, shivering as he took his shirt off and felt a few drops of cold water on his bare skin.

‘With my help, your wand-magic will become very powerful, and beloved? I think that you are going to need powerful weapons if you want to survive.’

Harry nodded sombrely, agreeing with Meciél. For a moment, it looked like he had something else to say but instead, he looked into the shower again and frowned at the cold water spraying from the nozzle, hesitant to enter.

“Would you make it warm for me?” He asked.

‘Of course’

“And no peeking!”

Later that day, Harry Potter limped down the busy streets of London, looking nothing like the famous wand-wizard he really was. As far as disguises went, the one Harry was using was fairly simple. He wore a plain t-shirt, something any kid his age would wear, and a pair of non-remarkable jeans. He had brought one of those cheap spray-on hair colours from a nearby party store that he had passed and now his dark hair was now a very noticeable fake-blonde. He had covered up his scar with a piece of ratty, dark cloth, which had been part of the once-bloodied, now burnt shirt he had been wearing in his encounter with Deirdre. His green eyes had been the easiest thing to change because he had simply asked Meciél to do it for him. He didn’t know how she had done it and all he knew was that his new brown eyes were supposed to last for about two hours before they changed back.

This was the boy that stopped in front of a dingy inn centred between a small bookshop and an old and abandoned record shop. People kept walking past him and Harry frowned as he saw that their eyes focussed first on the bookstore and slid right past the inn, coming to rest on the abandoned record store. It was as if they couldn’t see the inn in the first place.

‘A wand-wizard’s greatest concern is to keep the existence of magic secret from their non-magical, their muggle counterparts.’ Meciél whispered into his mind. ‘They have created a wide variety of spells

and wards to keep muggles from ever noticing, let alone remembering, something that may appear magical.'

Harry's expression cleared up and he observed the inn in front of him with a bit more respect. Obviously some powerful magic had been wrought on the old building. So this was the Leaky Cauldron. He stepped forward, past the walking pedestrians and placed his hand on the doorknob to the inn, taking Meciél's advice and schooling his features until his face was blank, before he opened the door and entered.

The room inside the Leaky Cauldron was cool, dark and full of chatting men and woman sitting at small, round tables. Burning torches had been hung on the walls and their light, accompanied by a blazing fireplace, was enough to cast a warm, comfortable glow around the room. On the other side of the room, Harry could see a well-rounded man with red cheeks and a balding head hand a man a bottle. Next to the bar, on the right, there was a staircase, which most likely led to the rooms, and on the left there was a small door, and the entire room was filled with the buzz of happy chatter and clinks of glass. Eventually, Harry's gaze turned back to the populace of the room. A few of them looked his way in mild interest but glanced away when they realised that he was only a child. Harry took a few steps in, a look of bemusement on his face as he ran his eyes over one of the nearby man's clothes. Although the man was a tall, broad man, with a thick, dirty beard and fierce eyes, he seemed to be wearing a black...dress of some sort.

'That's a robe, beloved. It is the standard dress of the wand-wizard.'

"I hope I don't have to wear one of those," Harry muttered softly to himself as he let his eyes wander away from the man, and saw that almost everybody in the Inn was wearing clothes of a similar nature, robes of all colours and more.

Suddenly movement caught his eye and he turned his head as a group of four cloaked and hooded figures quickly stood from their tables, leaving their dinners and drinks behind as they moved towards the staircase. The bartender called something out to them but they all ignored him as they quickly clambered up the stairs, and

as they went, Harry could have sworn that they were throwing him nervous stares from behind their hood.

‘They have every right to be afraid, beloved,’ said Meciél, amusement in her melodious voice. ‘They can sense a ‘great darkness’ about you,’

“If you keep this up, I’ll never make any friends,” Harry said softly, smiling in mirth as he walked through the room, his eyes flicking over tables and wand-wizards with curiosity, until he came to stand at the bar, gaining the attention of the bartender. The cheerful looking man handed a bottle of liquid to a robed man and looked down at him with a smile.

“Can I help you?” he asked with joviality in his voice.

Harry, listening closely to Meciél, repeated what she said to him.

“I need somebody to open the portal to Diagon Alley for me,”

The man frowned, looking past Harry and scanning the room for something.

“Parents usually do that for their children,” he said, a slight frown on his face when he couldn’t see anybody new in the room that might have been Harry’s parents.

“I don’t have any,” Harry replied evenly.

The man blinked, suddenly looking flustered and nodded, wiping his hands on a dirty rag. He motioned for Harry to follow him as he reached into his dirty, grey robes and pulled out a slim stick of wood. Harry blinked as the man waved it at the sink behind him, muttering something under his breath, and watched in surprise as a wet cloth floated up from the sink and started furiously rubbing into a floating large, grimy crock-pot.

‘A True Wizard could not cast a spell that would do something as simple that,’ Meciél said.

Harry blinked and shook his head, following the man as he walked around the bar and entered the small door, leading Harry out into a small, walled courtyard. Harry frowned, examining the area and seeing nothing more than scuffed grass and large weeds. He watched as the bartender walked up the one of the brick walls and tapped several different bricks with his wand. For a moment, nothing happened, before Harry let out an unwilling gasp as the bricks groaned, grinding against each other as they fell apart, and a small hole appeared. The hole grew larger and larger until an archway stood where the wall had, leading into Diagon Alley.

“Now, you come back here if you have any trouble and I’ll....” The bartender started, before he trailed off as Harry walked past him without a second glance. “Be glad to help.” He finished, scratching his balding head. “Hmm, what a nice boy, a little shy, sure, but real nice.” Harry slowly walked down Diagon Alley, his eyes wide despite his attempts to appear nonchalant. The alley was nothing like he had ever seen before. He had done magic before, channelling Hellfire into his spells and summoning demons up in ritual circles, but he had never seen a place that had so much magic happening at once. Robed wand-wizards and wand-witches strolled up and down the alley, chattering with each other happily as they walked in and out of strange shops. These shops seemed to be catering to the magic stereotype. One of them was selling cauldrons, some as tiny as his hand and others as big as he was. One of the other shops had a gleaming, well-polished broom in its window and Harry saw several young children, his age and even older, staring at it with envy and need in their eyes. He saw a small girl wearing a witches hat come out of a pet store of some kind, holding a small toad to her cheek lovingly while her mother dragged her away.

‘Be careful, beloved, you’re gaping.’ Meciél said dryly.

Harry closed his mouth with a snap and turned his gaze down the alley. Right at the end was a large, gleaming marble building. Large pillars jutted out from the ground and a steady flow of wizards and witches walked to and from the small staircases and into the large granite archways entering into the building. In his mind, Meciél stirred as she viewed the building from Harry’s eyes.

‘That is Gringotts. From what I know, it is the main wand-wizard’s bank. Remember what I said, the bank is run by a species of creatures called goblins. They will be able to detect that you have aligned yourself with the darker powers and will be very cautious of you. Be...’

“Firm, but do not appear threatening...” Harry interrupted out loud, rolling his eyes in annoyance. “You’ve only told me a hundred times already.”

Meciel gave a quiet grumble of disapproval in his mind as a nearby wand-wizard eyed him strangely. Harry stared back at him, scowling furiously as he folded his arms.

“What?” He demanded childishly “You have a problem?”

The wand-wizard eyed him for a few more seconds, before he shrugged his shoulders and walked past Harry, not paying the odd boy any more attention. Harry continued scowling as he made his way down the alley and approached the large marble building, making his way up the steps and stepping into the large foyer.

The first thing Harry noticed were the large queues of robed wand-wizards standing behind several large tables. The second thing he noticed was the goblins. Meciel had been right when she had called them ugly creatures. They had long, sharp crooked noses, beady and glaring little eyes and wrinkled, leathery skin. The third thing he noticed was that every goblin in the room, including a pair of spear-wielding guards at the back, had looked up and was staring at him. Although Harry wasn’t an expert of the facial expressions of a goblin, he thought that they were watching him with a mixture of nervousness and alertness, as if they were waiting for the right time to attack.

“Firm, but not threatening,” Harry muttered to himself softly before he squared his small shoulders and walked briskly past the queues, ignoring the small cries of protest as he approached the nearest counter, where a goblin was currently serving a middle-aged man who, to Harry, appeared a little bit on the drunk side. The goblin

stared at him impassively but seemed to grimace when Harry placed a hand into his pocket. The spear-wielding guards halted in their advancement as Harry paused, allowing a small and cold smile to appear on his face, before he pulled his hand out of his pocket and threw a wad of twenty-pound bills onto the counter.

"I want this exchanged into wand-wizard money," Harry said firmly, but non-threateningly as he eyed the goblin. "Can you do this?"

"Hey, I was here first, kid," The man at the counter protested.

The goblin ignored the man as he assessed Harry carefully, his beady eyes scanning Harry warily as he slowly reached over and picked up the wad of money. He brought it up to his nose and sniffed it, breathing in deep gulps of air as if he were trying to inhale the money. Harry waited in silence, mindful that the rest of the bank, goblins and wizards alike, were staring at him, the goblins in apprehension and the wand-wizards in confusion. Soft mutters went up and down the line as the goblin stopped sniffing the money, but the spear-wielding goblins inched closer and closer, their gaze deadly. It was then that the man at the counter spoke up again, his voice sharp and irritable.

"Hey, what did I just say you stupid little spoiled brat! Get to the back of the line!" He snapped and gave Harry a small shove on the shoulder. Harry stumbled backwards a few steps and suddenly his face became cold and dangerous. He cocked his head and eyed the man, his fake-brown eyes staring at the wand-wizard without blinking. The man gazed back at him blearily, while the rest of the queue had suddenly quieted at the sudden use of physical force.

"Look kid," The man started angrily, reaching forward as if he were going to push Harry again, frustration and annoyance on his face as he brandished towards the child. "You had better..."

But Harry had moved as soon as the man had, his left hand coming up as he summoned his power. Dark power rushed into him, searing into his veins with an intoxicating and pleasurable tingle as he grasped Hellfire, readying it to strike. His mind, which had been

tensed, loosed as a dark smile curved his lips, his eyes glinting as the jewel on his crude ring flickered with dark power.

To the wand-wizards, it was as if he had merely put his hand up in a vain attempt to defend himself against the larger man. To the goblins, however, they could see an ancient darkness rise up around him, a dark scarlet and ebony glow that surrounded and seared into his very being as a dark, black light spilled into his hands. They all tensed and the guards, abandoning all pretence of sneaking, started the twenty metre distance at a run. It was at that moment that the goblin teller slammed his hand down on the counter with a loud thump, startling both Harry and the man with the wand, who both turned to eyes to the small creature. The guards slowed and stopped as the goblin started talking, their eyes hard as they gazed at Harry unblinkingly.

“Please be patient, sir,” the goblin started in a quiet voice. “While I conclude my business with this young....man.”

The man growled in annoyance, disbelief showing on his face as he looked around for support, but he took a step backwards as Harry continued to stare at him intently, the dark power still searing into his veins, setting his very blood alight with rage and anger. A small snarl curled his lips as he took a step forward, a blind rage trying to cloud his mind, but with some effort, he straightened himself and took a deep breath, closing his eyes and allowing the power within him to dissipate. He opened his eyes again and gave the man in front of him a mock-cheerful grin, waving a hand as he turned back to the goblins desk. The goblin was already counting out the wad of bills as fast as he could, flicking small coins of gold, silver and occasionally bronze into a small sack as he did so. Finally, he finished his counting and placed the bag on the counter in front of Harry. Harry eyed it and without another word, snatched it up. Tension seemed to leave the room as he whirled around and left without another word. The guards stalked back to their positions with disgruntled looks on their faces and the tellers went back to work, a low hum of conversation starting up again as the witches and wizards in the queues wondered what they had just seen.

Outside Gringotts, Harry dropped his emotionless face as he walked down the steps, his bag of money jingling in his hand as he furrowed

his brow, scanning the span of Diagon Alley. Within his mind, Meciél spoke with approval in her voice.

‘Well played, beloved, although you almost came close to killing that man in there. A degree of restraint is needed if you wish to remain undetected.’

“Yeah, yeah,” Harry said irritably, a frown on his young face. “So, are we just getting a wand or should we go and get some books as well?”

‘You will learn more from me in a week than you will learn from a wand-wizard in a year.’ Meciél answered with a note of scorn and derision in her voice. ‘I know ways of magic that these wand-wizards can only dream of.’

“Yes, because you’re so modest about it,” Harry muttered to himself softly and smiled in amusement as he felt Meciél annoyance.

‘Do you know, beloved, I have noticed you have developed a very bad attitude as of late?’

“Really,” Harry murmured, a mischievous smile curving his lips. “I wonder who I could have learnt that from.”

Meciél let out a little huff as Harry finally found the store he was looking for, a narrow and shabby shop. Peeling gold letters over the read door read Ollivanders: Makers of Fine Wands since 382 BC and in the small display window, a grubby wand lay on a small purple cushion.

The moment Harry entered; a tinkling bell rang out through the large shop as Harry stared around. The entire shop smelled dusty and old and while light flittered in from the store window, darkness shrouded most of the shop. A small counter lay ahead of him; behind it stacks and stacks of shelves holding small wooden boxes, and a gritty and old wooden chair had been placed to the side.

Suddenly a man appeared out from the shelves, dressed in faded grey robes, moving as he if were almost gliding. White hair covered

his head as his misty silver eyes peered at Harry carefully. The man started as he did, his eyes widening as he came to a stop at the counter.

"A Denarian host," he murmured in soft surprise. "What could one of you possibly want with me?"

Harry blinked in surprise and he felt Meciél give a similar mental start as he stared back at the man, a look of irritation washing over his face.

"Can everybody in your world find out what I am just by looking at me, or I am just having a bad day?" He asked flatly.

"Those who have proper eyes can easily see your true nature, angel of darkness," Ollivander responded, smiling mysteriously as his white teeth glinted in the darkness.

"You have Third eye, the Sight," Harry said with dawning comprehension.

Ollivander inclined his head and his smile disappeared, a mask of professional curtesy washing over his face.

"What is it that you want?"

"Obviously, I want a wand," Harry said, gesturing around the store as he continued. "This is why I came to a wand shop."

"I didn't realise that your kind chose wand-wizards for hosts," Ollivander asked, faint surprise in his voice.

"Could you stop talking like I wasn't here?" Harry snapped in irritation, glaring at the man with his brown eyes. "Because I can hear you."

"You are still in control of your body?" Ollivander asked, true astonishment on his face. "That is quite amazing."

“You know, you’re not the first person to ask me that question,” Harry stated, cocking his head as he remembered Deirdre saying something very similar. “Look, I just want to buy a wand.”

“Very well, young one,” Ollivander said after a few moments of silent thinking and he turned around, disappearing amongst the shelves of the store. There was a sound of somebody rummaging around for something and a short while later, the wand-maker returned, his arms loaded with slim boxes. He placed them all on the counter of his shop and opened up the first box, taking out a slim, piece of polished wood and handing it to Harry.

Harry frowned as he accepted the wand and although he couldn’t feel anything wrong with it, Ollivander shook his head, muttering to himself as Meciél did much the same in his head. Harry looked at the wand-maker inquisitively, only to have the wand snatched from his hand and another one shoved into it. He raised it to give it a wave.

‘No, it is not this wand.’ Meciél murmured into his mind.

Apparently Ollivander thought much the same as he quickly snatched it away. Harry frowned in annoyance and gave the wand-maker a nasty look as another wand was shoved into his hand, but Ollivander either missed it or ignored it as he watched Harry’s hand and the wand carefully. He mustn’t have liked what he had seen because he went to snatch it away, but Harry quickly moved it out of his grasp and the man stared at him in confusion.

“That’s very annoying,” Harry said darkly.

For a moment, Harry thought that the wand-maker looked quite uncomfortable, but the old man’s face smoothed over quickly as he bowed his head in apology.

“My apologies, try this one instead.”

Harry took the wand, but the moment his fingers clasped around the wooden stick, Meciél made a noise of dissatisfaction and Harry sighed, handing the wand back to the wand-maker as he shook his head.

'This could proceed much quicker if you were to use your Third Eye to scan the wands,' Meciél said quietly. 'I will be able to find it for you far quicker than this wand-wizard can.'

"Alright," Harry said out loud, ignoring Ollivanders look of puzzlement as he batted away the old man's hand and made his way around the counter. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath, preparing to open himself up to the true nature of the wands, to see beyond the physical surface and into the deeper surfaces of magical phenomena.

When he opened his eyes, he almost flinched as hundreds of bright lights struck his eyes. It was as if every single box on every shelf had suddenly caught alight, bright auras of glowing and pulsing magic nestled around them. This magic, while warm, seemed to be wrong somehow, as if it didn't truly belong in this world.

Ghostly figures arose from the boxes, trees of all different kinds sprouting out across the shelves. Although they mixed and overlapped each other, Harry had no problems seeing the individual trees of every box. There were also ghostly figures of beasts arising from the boxes, variations of three different types. One was a ghostly bird that had seemingly been wreathed in ghostly flames; the other was a horse-like creature with a horn that Harry knew from descriptions to be a unicorn, and the last was a flying, scaled and fire-breathing animal that could only be a dragon.

Harry ran his eyes up and down the shelves until, at last, Meciél ordered him to stop. He looked back, his eyes skimming over ghostly images of trees and beasts, until a particular one caught his eye and he immediately knew that it was his. It was a slender, black box that had been tucked away on the bottom row of the shelf. A large, ghostly tree sprouted from the box, looming over the others, and a ghostly bird that was seemingly made up of fire flew around it.

"This is it," Harry said calmly as he closed his eyes, switching off the Sight. When he opened them up again, the multitudes of bright glows had disappeared and he mentally sighed in relief, rubbing his head with a frown as if he could feel the onset of a headache.

“This box?” Ollivander asked, his eyes widening as he stared at Harry with something akin to astonishment. “The small, dark box on the bottom shelf?”

Harry nodded and watched as the slender man bent down and retrieved it, holding it gently as if there were something valuable in it. Ollivander walked back to the counter, Harry trailing after him, and set the box down carefully. With bated breath, the old man slowly opened the lid and allowed Harry to peer inside. Sitting in the box was a gleaming wand, over ten inches at least. Harry eyed it and with a smile, reached out with his hand and grasped it.

Immediately, Harry could feel a current of power flow into his body. This magic was far different from the power granted to him by Meciél; it was less intense and cooler, flowing through his body like a cold glass of water on a hot day. He stared at the wand with a pleased expression on his face as Ollivander spoke up, his voice quiet and sombre in the small shop.

“Eleven inches, Holly and Phoenix Feather, nice and supple,” He said quietly, his silver eyes regarding Harry carefully. “There is great potential in that wand, for good...and for evil.”

“We’re going to take this one,” Harry said and reached into his robes, pulling out his bag of gold and throwing it onto the counter. “You can keep the change.”

Ollivander was staring at him with a peculiar expression on his face as Harry turned to leave. His hand was just about to grasp the doorknob when Meciél spoke up.

‘You had best make sure that this wand-maker does not reveal this purchase to anybody, beloved.’

“Before I go,” Harry said slowly as he turned around, eyeing Ollivander carefully. “I want you to swear to me that you will not tell anybody that I was here and that I bought the wand.”

Ollivander hesitated, but a hard glare from Harry made him slowly nod in agreement.

“I swear,” He said quietly.

“Do you know of the Old Rules and the code of conduct between immortal beings?” Harry asked.

Ollivander nodded again and Harry continued his face hardening into something that made his childish face look far darker than his age.

“If you break your oath, it will be very bad for you, do you understand?”

Harry didn’t wait for the old wand-maker’s response as he turned back to the door, opening it and stepping out to the bright, sunny sky. He took in a deep breath as he exhaled the last of the dust-ridden air within the wand store and observed milling wand-wizards as they traversed the alley, chatting and laughing with each other.

‘He was an odd man, even for a wand-wizard.’

“Yeah,” Harry said softly. “So, is that all?”

‘Yes, we have what we need. Beloved, I believe we are ready to leave England.’

Harry frowned, making a noise of protest in the back of his throat as he tried to secure the sword scabbard on his back, but the long, slender case remained as uncomfortable and awkward as ever, and he finally gave up with a sigh of disgust, flinging the scabbard off his back.

“Why couldn’t I have gotten a sword that doesn’t keep hitting me in the back of my knees?” Harry complained out loud, exhaling loudly in frustration.

‘Perhaps you should carry it,’ offered Meciél, her voice laced with amusement. ‘We are travelling a dangerous path and the sword may be very useful if we are attacked.’

Harry nodded, his tantrum forgotten as he unsheathed the sword from the scabbard. Metal hissed on metal as the blade withdrew, a gleaming blade of steel etched with runes. The sword was almost as big as Harry was and despite his recent abilities and skills given to him by Meciél, he fumbled with it as he tried to slice it through the air.

Because of Harry’s very recent encounter with Deirdre, which had ended in a battle where she had completely wiped the ground with him, Meciél had strongly advised him that it would be safer to leave England for a while, as to throw the Order of the Blackened Denarius, the other people like him, off their tracks. However, as a magical child who had been granted considerable powers as the host of a Fallen angel, the normal methods of travelling, such as boats and planes, were out of the picture because of the way electronic items tended to short out in the presence of magic. If Harry had been more proficient at wand-magic, he would have taken Meciél on her suggestion of a magical device called a portkey. But since his wand was only a few hours old, Harry didn’t have the first clue on how to build one. Another wand-wizard method of travelling, one Meciél called extremely useful, was apparition, but Harry had no idea how to perform that and Meciél had advised against trying to jump from continent to continent, lest he leave behind an arm or a leg. In the end, Meciél had suggested that they travel the relatively quick but dangerous way. So Harry was gearing himself up for a short trek through the Nevernever.

The Nevernever was, essentially, the other side, the opposite of the mortal world and home to everything that didn't belong in the mortal realm. The deepest reaches of the Nevernever was where the most powerful demons and other creatures of evil and temptation resided. These creatures, although extremely powerful in their true form, couldn't travel to the mortal realm without the help of a ritual summoning, and the very act of creating a physical body to house their consciousness on Earth drastically weakened them. Still, most of them still had more power on Earth than the average wizard, true or wand, and were considered to be very dangerous on Earth. No human, wizard or not, would have even attempted to travel that deep into the Nevernever and Meciél had told him that they wouldn't make half-way before the necessities of life such as air became limited. Still, there were places in the Nevernever that were closer to the mortal world than others and with proper knowledge, could be used as a shortcut. This was Harry's destination. However, these places were occupied and controlled by the immortal Sidhe and made up of thousands of different types of Faeries.

Harry gripped his sword in his right hand as he casually tucked his gun into his pants, the silver revolver feeling heavy against his waist. Meciél had told him that the gun wouldn't be a reliable weapon in the Nevernever, but it wouldn't hurt to bring it along anyway.

'The Nevernever has different rules than your world, beloved. It is a different reality that is constantly changing and there will be places where the chemicals used to ignite a gun are not combustible.'

"Whatever," Harry mumbled as he strapped his backpack to his back. He quickly looked over the small room, making sure he hadn't left anything behind, and then to one of the paint-peeling walls, awaiting Meciél's help to open up the portal.

'This section of the Nevernever is ruled by the Faerie courts, beloved. Remember what I have told you.'

"Two courts, got it," Harry said, rolling his eyes and slumping his shoulders down as he prepared to listen through another one of Meciél's lectures.

'It is important that you understand this information, beloved. Now, these courts are opposite and rivals. On one side of the Nevernever lies the Summer Court, home of the Seelie, the summer fae, ruled by the Summer Queens. On the other side lies the Winter Court, home of the Unseelie, the winter fae, ruled by the Winter Queens.'

"Summer fae are the nice ones, right?" Harry interrupted.

'The correct term is gentler. Most Sidhe only care what they can acquire from mortals, nothing more. The Sidhe are bound by the Old World rules and they are all very interested in making bargains and deals with both each other and mortals.'

"Why?"

'It's in their nature. The concept of debt and obligation is a huge factor in how they behave. A fae will honour their word if they give it, and they are unable to directly lie. However, this makes them masters of misdirection and deceit. Do not accept anything from them for they will consider it an unspoken bargain and expect payment. Do not offer them anything; they will perceive it as an insult unless it is something of great value. If worse comes to worse, all Fae have a weakness against iron, and this includes steel, so use your sword and flee when you can.'

"Okay, two courts, Winter and Summer, ruled by Queens," Harry shot off quickly, lazily scratching his head. "Er...Faerie like making bargains, don't accept anything, don't reject anything, they're weak against iron so cut 'em up if I need to, got it. Let's go already."

'My, somebody's anxious.' Meciél said in amusement. 'Very well, beloved; Allow me to open our path.'

Harry suddenly felt Meciél's searing power roar into his body, an intense wave of heat shooting through his veins and settling in the pit of his stomach. His hands suddenly lifted up as something slithered over his brain and he had to grit his teeth so he didn't reject the foreign mental presence. This must have been what Deirdre and Ollivander had been saying about Meciél taking over his body. The blazing pool of power in the pit of his stomach suddenly roared into

his hands, dark pools of power flickering in the air as they wove themselves into a spell far too complex for Harry to manage at the moment. The cheap jewel on his crude ring glinted and blazed with a dark-scarlet light as it channelled and focussed the roaring power and suddenly the wall in front of him shimmered.

Light and colour shifted over the wall, their flow quickening, deepening. At first nothing else happened.. Then a cold wind wafted into the room, bringing a dry and sterile scent into the room. A smooth, even split appeared on the wall, small at first but rapidly expanding as it grew to encompass the whole wall. A deep blue came to dominate the swirling mass of colours on the screen, a brilliantly clear blue sky resolving itself around a range of bleak and hateful stone peaks, wreathed in mist and wrapped in ice and snow. The wind howled, blowing a fine mist of icy crystals into the room, before it died down, leaving the small room in silence.

“That’s the Nevernever?” asked Harry with wide eyes, power still pooling in his hands as Meciél maintained the spell, his ring glowing brightly in the dim room as he faced what once had been a wall. The portal didn’t flicker or shimmer and remained perfectly still and flat and Harry approached it with trepidation.

‘All you need to do is step through it, beloved.’

With a casual flick of his hand, Harry leeches a bit of power from the pooling spell, his sword flying from the ground and into his hands. He gripped it firmly and without a second thought, stepped through the portal and into the land of Winter. A moment later, the wall suddenly flickered as it reverted back to its normal self and all that remained of the portals existence was a fine layer of snow, which quickly melted away.

Harry was cold. At least, he thought he was cold. He had lost feeling in most parts of his body and his fingers had gone so numb that he couldn’t even grip his sword properly; he had already dropped it twice. He shivered as he rubbed his shivering arms, staring around at the beautiful and icy surroundings with a look of despair.

“Please tell me that it’s not going to be this cold for the entire trip,” He said loudly, his teeth chattering together.

Meciel suddenly appeared beside him, her face seemingly unconcerned with the coldness as her illusion placed a hand on his shoulder. Suddenly searing warmth flooded into his body and Harry sighed in relief, allowing himself to relax. The icy wind that had been slapping against his face suddenly turned into a warm breeze, as if somebody was brushing his hair from his eyes with gentle fingers.

“That’s a lot better,” Harry said in relief and he turned to Meciel, a genuine smile on his face. “Thanks.”

“I have done what I can to ease the cold,” Meciel said quietly. “But most of what you are feeling is an illusion. Your body is still cold and may take damage if we linger for too long.”

“Is it meant to be this cold?” Harry asked, eyeing his surroundings with a look of distaste on his face. “I thought you said it would be manageable?”

“It should be,” answered Meciel, her face slightly troubled. “I believe that there must be a powerful creature of Winter nearby. I suggest that we move quickly and quietly, lest we attract its attention.”

“We could go back and wait until its left,” Harry offered, picking up his sword with firm fingers and gripping it tightly.

Meciel shook her head, her dark glittery hair swaying over her back.

“The portal I opened will have been sensed by those who have the proper talents,” She answered. “This will include both the Order of the Black Denarius, True Wizards and even Wand-Wizards. I did not take the proper precautions to shield the portal as I did when we summoned the demon the other day.”

“So we have to go forward,” Harry said, suddenly squinting as the sun emerged from behind a large, angry storm-cloud.

“Yes,” Meciél said, gesturing with her hand towards a thick, snow-covered forest. “We should start in that direction.”

Harry nodded and with one last look at his surroundings, started trudging through the snow towards the large forest, the illusion of Meciél by his side.

Harry didn’t know how long he had been walking for and how far he had walked so far as he traipsed through the icy and beautiful forest, his feet dragging through the snow. He could remember Meciél saying that time and distance worked different here in the Nevernever than it did in the real world, but that seemed like an eternity ago. The forest he was walking in was completely silent. There were no animals, no birds that chirped from the trees and no plants rustled in the light breeze. The trees were all partially covered in a thin but hard layer of black ice, which shot up into their trunks and dug into the bark as if it were ensnaring it.

His only company was Meciél, who continued to walk next to him, her beautiful features highlighted by the dark glow of the black ice. Her silver eyes seemed to glow in the darkened forest as she paced after Harry, content with both the moments of comfortable silence and the moments where Harry conversed with her.

“So, have you ever been to this place before?” Harry asked, idly kicking away a clump of snow as he plodded through the thick layer of snow. “Like, really been here in person.”

Meciél shook her head. “The Winter and Summer Courts did not even exist when I roamed free. The Fae were no more than rabble, blinded by their own greed and envy. Oh beloved, you have no idea what history I can teach you.”

Harry opened his mouth to speak when he frowned, a look of disgust coming over his face as something truly horrible and foul drifted into his nostrils. He blinked, his eyes watering as he pinched his nose, sending a glare at Meciél.

“I know that wasn’t me,” He said, his voice rising in pitch.

Meciel stared at him, a flash of irritation going through her eyes.

“Beloved, perhaps you forget that I am only an illusion within your mind,” She said quietly. “There is something here with us.”

Harry tensed, his eyes widening as he quickly darted his head around the beautiful sculpted forest. He stopped walking and raised his sword, his dark power flowing into him until it was as if an inferno had been set alight in the pit of his stomach. His ring glinted with power and he whirled around as he heard a rustle, just as a creature stepped out from the trees.

The creature had green, leathery skin and beady eyes. It stood at eleven-feet, baring its sharp teeth as a cloud of black, foul vapour escaped its mouth with every breath. It snorted, bringing up a thick arm to scratch its armpit as it glared at Harry with malignant anger.

“Mortal child!” He shouted, his loud voice booming in the forest as he approached Harry with thundering footsteps. “You trespassing! Jlorf no like trespassers!”

‘It is a Troll, beloved! It is not a very smart creature but in their native home, they are far more powerful than they appear in the mortal realm. Attempt to frighten it away.’

Harry swung his sword through the air in a threatening manner, his body flowing through a series of movements as the unconscious instincts and skills of Meciel’s previous hosts flowed through him. The blade made a sharp whistling noise as it sliced through the air, halting the troll in its tracks as it stared at the blade, while Harry stumbled as the weight of the blade in motion threw his balance off.

“This is made of steel, or iron,” Harry hissed, regaining his step. “It slices through trolls like a hot knife slices through human flesh. Attack me if you dare!”

“Jlorf not afraid!” The troll snarled, its beady eyes tightening with anger, and without a moments hesitation, it continued in its charge, its footsteps thundering on the ground as it stretched out its arms.

Harry automatically sidestepped to the right, clumsily bringing his sword up to meet the rushing troll. Although his movements were far from perfect, the tip of his sword dug into green flesh as the troll rushed past. The troll let out a howl of pain, green blood glowing through the wound as the sword slice into it with ease. Flesh sizzled as the troll whirled around, a fanatic anger in its eyes as it raised a hand. Violet and emerald light flickered together as the troll gathered its power and hurled it at Harry, who awkwardly raised his steel sword. The faerie fire, a swirling thunderbolt of glowing magic, struck the sword and broke apart in the presence of steel, the air alight with sparkling green and purple hues.

“Firagen!” Harry hissed coldly, the incantation of his evocation focussing and directing his dark powers.

He raised his left hand, dark power searing into his veins like a cascading torrent of intense heat. The smell of sulphur filled his nose, his crude ring glinting with a dark-azure light as a shimmering ripple of air formed in his left palm. With a quick flick of his wrist, the spell blasted from his hand, directed by the ring as it formed into a brightly glowing streak of fire. The troll moved faster than Harry would have thought possible, but it wasn’t fast enough as the fire dug into its side, searing flesh with its blazing heat.

The troll let out a scream of agony and stumbled back, eyeing Harry with a lot more fear and caution than it had before. Blood pooled from its side from the sword wound and half of its chest was covered in thick, angry burns. With a soft snarl, the huge beast whirled around and thundered through the trees as it ran for its life.

‘It will summon its allies and other of its kind, beloved. Chase it, kill it! Kill it!’

Harry took after the troll at a run, his sword slicing through the icy earth as he gripped it with his right hand, his left hand flying up as he shouted another incantation. Fire streaked through the air, red and yellow flames blasting upon a tree covered in black ice as it narrowly missed the limping troll.

For the next few minutes, Harry sprinted along the icy forests. The muscles in his legs burned as he ducked between huge, icy trees, his sword clumsily gripped in his right hand. He panted in exhaustion but his lips were curled in a smile of excitement, adrenaline and a sense of enjoyment rushing through him as he spotted a flicker of movement ahead of him, a flash of green flesh.

“Firerajo!” He shouted, his green eyes alight with dark power. Burning azure flames burst from his left palm, something steel-hard, steel-sharp. A thin arc, like a boomerang, shot through the air, filled with compressed flames and flickering with a soft blue light. Ice melted as it zoomed past, plants kindled and the air visible rippled as the arc sliced past the foliage, shattering upon a large, icy tree like a Molotov cocktail of blue flames.

‘There, beloved! On your right!’

Harry hadn’t caught the flash of movement in the corner of his eyes but Meciél had and without another word, he sprinted after it, dodging and weaving through the trees as he caught up with the wounded and limping troll, even with his small legs. The troll was standing on a small ledge with about a three metre drop and its head shot around as Harry burst from the trees, lifting his sword high and preparing to lunge. Without another word, the troll turned around and jumped from the ledge and a thundering cry. Harry gritted his teeth as he approached the ledge with at a sprint, gripping his sword tightly in both hands, and without a second thought, he jumped after the troll.

The troll landed on the icy ground with a thump, its eyes lighting up in a mixture of relief and anticipation as it saw its refuge. As it limped forward, its sharp ears picked up a rustling sound behind him and he whirled around, baring his sharp, green teeth as the boy-child landed on the ground with a loud thump, a grimace of pain flashing across his face. But the pain didn’t stop the blazing pool of fire pooling in the boys hands from streaking out, digging into the trolls hide with a blaze of searing heat and sizzling flesh. The troll screamed in agony, clutching his chest as dark green blood oozed from the new wound, taking a staggered step forward as inhuman rage filled its veins, raising a fist to strike at the boy.

Harry let the troll come to him, ignoring the sharp, shooting pain coming up from his ankle as he limped forward, his sword rising in his hands. Grim determination and exhilaration sang in his veins and at the last second, he thrust forward with all of his might, steel burying itself deep into faeries flesh, slicing past bones and muscle. The troll made a gurgling noise, stumbling back as its eyes widened in a mixture of shock and horror. Blood flowed from the new wound, dark droplets of green staining the pure white snow as the beast tumbled to the ground, its strength fading as it died.

‘Beloved, look ahead!’

Harry lifted his eyes from the troll and blinked in shock, dread suddenly replacing the exhilaration as laid eyes on what the troll was trying to reach. There was a small, icy pathway, a road of sorts, ahead. On this road there was a convoy of dozens of creatures surrounding a carriage made up of pure black ice, harnessed by four powerful-looking black-furred horses with sharp, incisor-like horn on their heads.

Dozens, hundreds even, of guards stood around this carriage. Trolls, twice as large as the one he had killed, grunted with anger behind black-ice armour, swords of frost blazing with the power of winter in their hands. Strange creatures, half-man and half-horse, cocked back thick bows, icy shards preparing to fly through the air at a moments notice. Dozens of little sparkling lights flew around the carriage, a beautiful wave of light, until Harry realised that they were faeries as well.

He put weight on his ankle, trying to keep the wince off his face as pain shot up his leg, a terrible flash that almost put tears into his eyes. Suddenly he felt Meciél’s presence, her warmth spreading down into his ankle with a gentle glow and numbing the pain away. He tensed and prepared to run as the first few trolls stepped forward menacingly, but suddenly, they all stopped as a pale hand appeared from the carriage of black ice. The trolls stepped back into formation as the carriage door opened and a beautiful girl stepped out.

Her features were pale, radiant, perfect, and too perfect to be human. She looked young, maybe in her teenage years or early twenties,

Harry couldn't tell as he stared at her open-mouthed. Her hair had been bound into long dreadlocks, each of them dyed a different shade, ranging from deep lavender to pale blues and greens to pure white, so that her hair looked as if it had been made from ice. She wore leather pants of dark blue, laced, which were ripped from calf to hip, showing off pale skin, and a white T-shirt tight around the bust. She had hacked the shirt off at the top of her rib cage, leaving pale flesh exposed. Long, opalescent fingernails tapped on her arm as she moved from the carriage with a liquid grace, a thoughtless, casual sensuality. Her face was beautiful, with strange canted, feline eyes, the colour almost identical to Harry's eyes.

At that moment, Harry had never seen anything more beautiful in his life and he gaped at the High Sidhe, a warm and pleasant haze filling his mind. Suddenly the haze shattered in a burst of searing heat and Harry shook his head, frowning as his head cleared.

"She was pushing a glamour on you, beloved!" Meciél said softly, warning in her voice. 'It was making you see and feel things that were not true! Be very wary here!'

"Well, it appears that we have a traveller in our fair lands," The girl said, her voice throaty as she eyed Harry, a smile curving her lips, as if she had known that her glamour had failed. She gestured to her carriage with her hand, her voice warm with sympathy. "You look cold, tired and hurt. Winter is a dangerous place to travel. Would you like to sit down and rest?"

'This is a trap, beloved! Remember what I told you about accepting anything from the Sidhe!'

Harry shook his head warily, his green eyes flickering over to the ranks of strong and powerful inhuman guards. "No thankyou," he said quietly.

The girl let out a small laugh as she approached him, waving her guards back as they attempted to follow her.

"You are polite for a boy of your age," she said softly, coming to stand in front of him. "And you have wisdom."

Harry said nothing as the girl surveyed his appearance with cool, feline eyes. Her gaze fell upon his sword and suddenly her smile faded ever so slightly, and when she spoke up next there was a tone of warning in her voice.

"Perhaps not so wise," She said quietly. "You dare to bare iron in presence. Don't know who I am?"

"Nope," Harry answered carefully, watching the Sidhe carefully.

The girl smiled; throwing out her arms in a grand gesture and straightening up with something akin to haughtiness on her face. Behind her, the ranks of creatures bowed in subservience, as if they had received some silent signal telling them move.

"I am the Lady of Winter," She whispered, her eyes fixed upon Harry's face. "I am the Queen to come, superior of every winter denizen save for Queen that is!"

Harry felt Meciél suddenly give the mental equivalent to a start in surprise and felt her focus on the girl in front of him carefully.

'This is Maeve?' Harry heard her think, before her attention came onto Harry, her voice worried. 'This is the powerful winter creature we sensed before, beloved. You could be in some serious trouble here.'

"Have no fear, Fallen," The Winter lady, Maeve said, her lips curving up into a smile as Harry started, staring at her with surprise. "I mean you no harm, of that you have my word."

"You can hear her?" Harry asked in surprise, suddenly eying the Sidhe in front of him in a new light.

This is my domain and will be my domain," said Maeve, smiling mysteriously. "I hear everything."

'She is right, beloved. She can sense my presence in the coin, and with her power and skill, I expect that she would have little trouble tapping into our link.'

Harry frowned in worry, his hand coming up to clutch his chest, where the coin dangled from his neck on a necklace he had warded and spelled. Meciél had told him that most people like him usually inserted the coins somewhere into their bodies, so they had contact with it at all times while keeping it hidden and safe. He hadn't been quite ready to cut himself open.

"I'm not here to take coin, my little Denarius renegade," Maeve said, eying his hand as if she knew what lay beneath his shirt. At Harry's look of surprise at his title, she let out a throaty laugh. "I saw your fight with the other woman not so long ago. It was a very spectacular defeat."

"You saw that?" Harry echoed in shock.

"Oh yes," Maeve said, her eyes glittering. "The Order of the Blackened Denarius is a fascinating organisation to watch, especially when they clash with each other. Watch here, my little renegade."

Harry watched as she raised her hand and suddenly staggered back as faeries power flared into it. A nimbus of thick, glowing power surrounding the girl and suddenly Harry understood why she was a queen. The power pulsated, strong, potent and far more powerful than anything Harry had ever seen before. Maeve casually formed a complex spell with it, violet, bright green and dark blue strands of power pooling in her hand as she flicked her wrist at the icy ground beneath them. Harry looked down, fascinated as the ice shimmered as a moving image appeared from within the glacial depths.

He watched as a dragon-like creature appeared with wings of pure bone, whipping its tail and flinging a creature with dozens of metallic strands of hair away from it. The fight continued, the creatures exchanging blows until Harry winced as he saw the metal-haired creature, Deirdre, stab the wrym, Harry, in the chest.

"You are very young," Maeve said quietly and Harry looked up, meeting her almost-hypnotic stare. "And you have much potential within you."

Harry shuddered as she ran a finger down his chest, feelings bursting into his mind that were too mature for somebody his age.

“If you were to accept my help, I could make you a force to be reckoned with, a force more powerful than any of the other Denarians.”

Harry shook his head slowly, knowing where this was leading.

“No,” He said softly. “I don’t want to make a bargain with you.”

Maeve drew her hand back as if she had been slapped, shock flaring onto her features. The ice beneath the ground suddenly rippled as the image faded away, replaced with swirling grey clouds as power warped around the Winter Lady.

“Are you refusing me?” She said, her voice lashing out with power, and Harry flinched, almost staggering back as it washed over him, drilling into his head, but at Meciél’s urging he nodded shakily.

“I have more power in my hair than you do in your entire pathetic body and you refuse me!” Maeve hissed out, her pleasant face gone as something inhuman, cold and alien, appeared on her face. The sky seemingly darkened as clouds rumbled ahead and Harry suddenly shivered as a wave of coldness struck him, rubbing his arms as he gripped his sword, wondering if he should attack.

‘She would kill you before you have even lifted your arm,’ Meciél said soothingly, blowing away the shock of Maeve’s power with her warm presence. ‘Do not fall for this act. Maeve is far more manipulative than you could possibly realise.’

Suddenly the sky cleared and the icy wind stopped as the anger fell away from Maeve with ease, her faerie power disappearing as quickly as it had come. The Winter Lady let out a seductive smile as she eyed Harry’s chest, her gaze riveted on the exact place where the coin rested on its necklace.

“Ah Meciél,” She murmured, her voice throaty and warm. “You know me well.”

“You two have met?” Harry blurted out in surprise, still eying Maeve with wariness as he brushed snow and ice off his shoulders.

‘I didn’t recognise her at first, beloved, but yes, we have had our dealings in the past. The price was high but her aid was extremely useful.’

Maeve let out a tinkling laugh, throwing her head back and revealing her pale, flawless neck. She bent down, dropping to her knees, and turned her seductive gaze towards Harry, who swallowed nervously as her eyes met his, her pupils dilated as if she were on drugs or extremely aroused.

“Should you ever find yourself in need, young host of Meciél, do not hesitate to summon me,” She whispered softly and Harry shuddered with an unknown feeling as her warm breath tickled against his ear. “Perhaps we will sort out an agreement that will...satisfy...us both.”

“For a price,” Harry said, his voice almost squeaking as he tried to stay strong.

Maeve smiled seductively, her lips curving as she tossed her hair over her shoulder. She gazed at the boy in front of her and with a wicked smile, moved in and placed a soft kiss on his cheek. Harry started, tingles of pleasure and something else shooting through him as Maeve stood up, a smirk on her face.

“Of course, but there may be a time where the reward is well worth the price,” She said seductively, idly licking her lips.

Harry watched with an open mouth as she turned around, her hips swaying enticingly as she glided back to her carriage. She stepped back into it and turned around, blowing a kiss and winking with such a suggestive look on her face that Harry blushed, heat suffusing in his cheeks.

He watched as the carriage glided away, pulled by the dark-furred unicorns and surrounded by the centaur and troll guards, who marched to its quick pace. Dozens, hundreds even, of coloured wisps,

tiny fairies, followed after it as it turned a bend and disappeared behind a stalagmite of black ice.

“That was...” Harry started, his eyes almost dreamy, but trailed off hopelessly as he shook his head, shaking off the daze that Maeve’s mere presence had brought along. “Interesting?”

‘Indeed it was, beloved. You were lucky she appeared to be in a hurry, or you would have suffered far more than you know.’

The stars twinkled brightly in the night sky, the moon hanging lazily above as it glowed with a soft, warm light. In a deserted and empty location, near a small reserve, something ripped into the air, an uneven split that shimmered as a gust of icy snow blew out of it. Light filtered from it as a small figure stepped out, snow covering his clothes. The rip shimmered and suddenly disappeared as the boy casually waved his hand towards it, until there was no trace of it. The boy shook his hair, ruffling it with his hand as he brushed the hair away from it and then stepped forward, his eyes fixated on the large city ahead of him, lit up by multitudes of blinking lights as buildings towered into the sky.

“Well Meci, I guess this will be our new home for now,” Harry said softly, a smile coming over his face as he gazed at the glowing city ahead of him.

‘It will, beloved. Welcome to Chicago.’

Two Years Later

July 31st

ChicagoUSA

With a tired yawn, Harry blinked blearily and opened his dark green eyes as he awoke from his sleep in his very comfortable bed. He sat up, rubbing his eyes as he threw off the dark silk sheets and pulled himself off his queen-sized bed, letting another yawn escape his mouth. He hopped out of bed, his bare feet landing on a thick and luxurious fur rug as he reached onto his nightstand, picking up his wand. He ran his fingers over the grooves of several runes he had carved into the wand and gave it a short, sharp flick as he mentally incanted a spell.

Around the room, over three dozen candles suddenly flared to life, pushing away the darkness and revealing Harry's bedroom. Thick and expensive curtains permanently covered the window, held in place by carefully stitched runes and several wand-spells to prevent any nosy neighbours from peeking in. A very comfortable-looking leather chair sat in the corner, next to a small writing table, where a worn and thick notebook lay open, small symbols and runes inscribed onto the paper next to scrawls of childish writing.

Harry ignored all of this as he walked to the cupboard, opening it up and briefly glancing at himself in the mirror. He sure had grown up since he had arrived here two years ago, cold and shivering. Although he wasn't the tallest kid on the block, and he never would be, Meciél's careful manipulations of his body enabled him to have a high level of physical ability and strength, even if he didn't look like he did. He glanced away from the mirror and grabbed a shirt from one of the shelves, throwing it over his head, putting it on and closing the door.

Harry exited the bedroom and entered the largest room in the apartment. The room, unlike the bedroom, hadn't been dressed up for comfort and remained quite bare and empty. Candles littered the four corners of the room and with another short, sharp flick of his wand; they caught alight in small puffs of smoke, illuminating the room up. A

metallic circle that almost encompassed the entire room had been placed on the floor and on the walls, runic symbols had been carved in with far more elegance than one would have expected from an eleven year old. In the middle of this room, there was another circle with several runic symbols protruding outwards. Standing in the middle of this circle was the illusion of Meciél, who raised her eyebrow at Harry with an expression of amusement and affection on her face.

“Good morning, beloved,” The raven-haired woman said, her silver eyes sparkling as she dipped her head gracefully. “Happy birthday.”

“Thanks,” Harry said, throwing a smile at Meciél as he bent down to frown at one of the runes etched into the floor.

“Did you rest well?” Meciél asked, her lips curving up into a wicked smile. “I do imagine that there were bruises.”

“Oh no,” Harry said lightly. “Last night was just great. I mean, I’m still aching because of some of the things you did to me and I’m sore all over, but I loved it.”

“I’m glad you enjoyed it, beloved,” Meciél said, a smile curving her lips. “I did tell you that I could manipulate your body to feel pleasure...and pain.”

“Oh, there was plenty of that,” Harry said, chuckling roughly as he stood up, finding nothing wrong with the rune.

Meciél let a coy smile come over her face as she cocked her head, eyeing Harry with a sudden challenging look.

“Do you wish to do it again?” She asked softly, watching Harry with narrowed eyes.

“Now?” Harry asked, blinking in surprise. “Right here?”

Meciél nodded and Harry let a smile of anticipation come over his face as he stalked towards her.

Meciel suddenly blurred as her silver and white dressed faded away while Harry concentrated, dark power searing into his veins and through his crude ring, activating and powering the large, protective circle around the room. When he looked up, Meciel had changed her illusion so that it seemed as if she were wearing a set of plain white and silver robes and her hair in a ponytail. She, like Harry, had a slim piece of wood in her hand as beckoned him mockingly as the protective circle in Harry's official 'training room' glowed with a dark crimson and ebony light.

"Ready?" Meciel asked, raising a dark eyebrow as she stared down Harry's wand.

Harry nodded and suddenly jumped back, his wand flying ahead of him as he flicked it in a long, sweeping movement, his eyes suddenly cold and focussed.

"Irruptus Ardor!" Harry bellowed, his voice rising in the room. The tip of his wand glowed with a deep red light and searing bursts of blazing fire shot from his wand as he flicked it across in front of him.

Meciel flicked her own wand, an apparent frown of concentration on her face as she muttered a short, sharp incantation. The air in front of her rippled with a pale green light, a conjured circle of magic forming as the multiple and largely inaccurate blasts of fire ripped through the air. Only two of the eleven or twelve blasts of fire struck Meciel, striking her shield and dissipating with puffs of smokes, the pale green shield rippling with magic as if deflected the fire.

Of course, as an illusion, Meciel didn't really have a wand on her and she wasn't really able to cast a shield, let alone deflect a burst of fire. But, as Harry already knew, she was able to manipulate his mind into perceiving that she had summoned a shield that had deflected his spell, even though Harry knew that in reality the spell had travelled straight past her illusion and struck the powerful barriers surrounding the room. Still, this was the most effective way for Harry to practise his burgeoning skills on a skilled opponent without revealing himself to anybody else.

“Stupefy!” Meciél said loudly, her wand flicking through the air as a streak of scarlet magic zoomed through the air.

Harry didn’t even bother verbalising a spell as he slashed his wand through the air, and the streak of magic suddenly flickered and fell apart, disappearing in a shower of silver sparks. His next spell was a thin, sleek streak of bright red magic, crashed against Meciél’s shield and creating a rather loud roar through the room as it detonated in with a flare of light.

Meciél’s pale green shield shattered with the sound of loud chimes as the flare ended and Harry moved forward, thrusting his wand forward in a vicious jabbing movement, his eyes bright with battle lust.

“Exturbo Arduro!” Harry snarled.

Fire jutted from the tip of his wand, a flashing blast of heat and scorching flames blasting forward. Meciél didn’t raise a shield this time and gracefully sidestepped, ducking beneath the blasts of flames. The flash of flames and heat struck the barrier, which shimmered as it absorbed the fire, while Meciél glided forward, her wand flicking out in a powerful underarmed swipe.

A flash burst from the tip of her wand – an arc of glimmering silver magic slicing through the air, and Harry also sidestepped, nearly jumping to the side as the curse brushed past him. He let out a low growl as another silver flash of light zoomed towards him, clenching his wand tightly. He thumped himself in the chest, his eyes half-closed as he concentrated, and suddenly his very form began to glow in a soft red light. The air shimmered around him, rippling with newly formed thermals as the floor beneath his feet began to smoke as an aura of intense heat and magic surrounded him.

The flash of silver arc struck him and shattered into a thousand pieces. Showers of silver and red sparks glittered through the air as the spell broke apart on Harry’s aura of heat. Harry smirked and flicked out his hand, the tip of his wand glowing as the aura of heat seeped into his body and roared to the tip of his wand, which glowed with bright light that was building in intensity. He ducked Meciél’s next

curse, a sizzling bolt of silver magic and rose up again, brandishing his wand with a long, sweeping movement.

“Profundo!” Harry snapped out, his voice sharp and hard.

From the tip of his wand came a powerful jet of crystal clear water. As the water was still in the air, Harry gave a short flick with his wand and jabbed it forwards, and he released the heat inside. The tip of his wand lost its intense glow as it flashed and a wave of searing heat left his wand. There were no flames and no smoke, just a powerful heat that shot forward and struck the water. The instant it did, the water hissed and spluttered as it boiled over and, propelled forward by the pressure of the heat, billowed out into a cloud of steam.

Meciel’s eyes widened- she hadn’t picked this up in Harry’s thoughts, he had taken pain to shield this particular move from her, but she moved quickly as if the steam could have actually hurt her. Her wand whipped up and from it came a great gust of air, parting the billows of steam away from her.

“Very good, beloved,” She called out, her voice smooth and calm. “Remember that you can also channel Hellfire into your wand!”

Harry took her suggestion to heart as he opened himself up to Meciel’s powers, the dark torrent of cascading light searing into his very veins. His wand pulsed with dark light and smoke sizzled out of the various runes he had carved into it, a necessary precaution if he didn’t want the thing to explode in his face. The tip of his wand glowed in an unholy dark light, shimmering heat pulsing in soft flares as Harry brought it over his head and jabbed it forward, his eyes alight with demonic anger.

A cone of light blasted from his wand, seemingly nothing more than a simple lumos charm. But Meciel had conjured a thick, corporeal medieval shield and ducked behind it as the light came to settle upon her. For a moment, nothing happened, then dark veins of power flickered through the beam of light and the scent of sulphur and burnt wood filled the air as the wood in Harry’s wand curdled and smoked, channelling hellfire into the spell. The beam of light suddenly darkened until it radiated with an unholy dark light, crimson veins of

red and violet line shooting through it as it pushed against the thick, bronze shield. Harry could feel the suppressed heat of the spell travelling down the beam and onto the shield and watched with anticipation as the bronze shield....remained perfectly intact.

“Er...Meciel?” Harry called over his wand, still pumping the roaring power in his veins into the wand as he pushed against the shield. “Shouldn’t the shield be melting?”

Meciel blinked, glancing down, and inclined her head.

“Forgive me, beloved,” She murmured and suddenly, without any warning, thick drops of bronze-coloured sludge dripped to the ground as the cone of light seared into the metal. Harry could feel a few beads of sweat drip from his forehead as the temperature in the room increased but held the spell.

However, with a quick jab of her wand, Meciel banished the remains of the melting shield into the path of the spell and with a single fluid movement, Meciel ducked underneath the shield and sidestepped, coming up with her wand levelled at Harry. Her voice barked out a single command and from the tip of her wand came another one of her glimmering arcs of silver, sharp magic.

Harry broke off his spell and like last time, sidestepped, bringing his wand up to cast another spell at Meciel. But this time, the silver arc of razor-sharp magic spiralled through the air, elongating as it flattened out, and one of its edges struck Harry high in the chest. An intense wave of pain swept through his body and he let out a startled scream of pain as he fell to the ground, the pain building up and blinding him to the point where he couldn’t even move. Spittle ran down his mouth, his eyes tearing up as he tried to scream, tried to shout, and tried to move at all. He stayed like this for several seconds and then the pain vanished as quickly as it came, leaving Harry in a shivering heap on the ground.

Meciel was suddenly above him, her beautiful features hinting with slight concern as she stroked his sweaty forehead with her hand, which was suddenly blessedly cool. Harry leaned into the touch, his eyes closing as he took comfort from the Fallen.

"That hurt, you know?" Harry mumbled quietly. "Just as much as it did last night."

"Pain is a wonderful motivator to improve," Meciél said quietly, stroking his hair back with soothing hands as if it were a familiar movement to her. "In reality, that spell would have killed you. It would have torn through your heart with such force and speed that I would have been unable to heal it."

Harry grunted, partly in acknowledgement and partly in pain, and tried to get up, but he fell back down to the ground as sighed.

"You know what, I like the floor," he muttered. "So I think I'll stay here."

Meciél watched him with something akin to fondness in her eyes and lay down next to him, the warmth of her body wrapping itself around Harry and soothing his aches and pains. For a few minutes, neither said anything to each other until Harry broke the comfortable silence.

"You know, if you had been a real wand-wizard, I would have got you with that last spell," He murmured cockily.

"Are you certain of that, beloved?" Meciél asked carefully.

"Oh yeah," Harry said, nodding his head up and down. "The shield would have melted earlier, so I might have gotten them then, but the heat would have burnt their faces off."

"That is a fair point, beloved," Meciél agreed. "However, what if they had placed a modified flame-freezing charm around themselves to act as a shield of sorts?"

"I thought that only worked on normal fire," Harry said, his voice now drowsy and tranquil.

"Yes beloved, with direct contact magical fire will burn through it," Meciél agreed. "However, the flame-freezing charm would have blocked the heat of the spell."

“Eh,” Harry muttered and waved a hand. “Whatever.”

“You are getting much better,” Meciél said softly, praise and perhaps a touch of pride in her voice. “But perhaps we should lay off the training for today, beloved? It pains me to see you hurt as such.”

Harry grunted but didn’t say anything as Meciél fell into silence. A moment later, Harry allowed a small, wicked smile to curve his lips.

“Sook,” he muttered into the air.

Meciél raised an eyebrow and sat up, her face staring down at him impassively.

“I’m sorry, child?” She asked with a hint of mockery and teasing in her voice.

Harry made a face at her as he lay on his back, his eyes focussed on the wooden ceiling, where runes had been carved to create a silenced and enclosed area. No other person on the floor would have heard the very noisy duel Harry had just participated again, even if it was only against a figment of his imagination.

Meciél rolled her eyes and shook her head in exasperation, but didn’t even try to hide her smile of affection as she dispelled her illusion, leaving Harry alone in the large, barren room. After a few more moments, Harry sighed and forced himself to stand up. His work still wasn’t over for the day.

## HogwartsSchool of Witchcraft and Wizardry

The ancient school stood proudly against the moonlight, lights glittering from its windows and sparkling on the large lake that surrounded it. Although the school was devoid of children, it still radiated a sense of homeliness and laughter, as if the cheers and laughter had somehow been captured and imprinted into the very stone blocks of the old fortress.

Within the school, still hard at work in his office, Albus Dumbledore gave a little sigh of annoyance as he scrawled his name on yet another piece of parchment and placed it aside. He glanced up as his familiar, Fawkes, let out a soft crooning sound and allowed a small smile to come over his face, his eyes briefly twinkling behind his half-moon glasses.

“Yes, old friend, I quite agree,” He murmured, stroking his long, white beard with a gnarled hand. “Sadly, it must be done.”

The phoenix made a noise resembling a sniff as it tucked its head back into its wing and Albus smiled, turning back to the next piece of parchment. He clutched the quill and began to quickly scrawl something in his loopy handwriting when he sensed a presence disrupting one of his wards. He allowed a smile to curve his lips as he continued writing, mentally counting down the seconds it would take the person to reach his door. When he reached zero, his eyes twinkled as he coughed.

“You may come in, Minerva,” He called out, his voice quavering through the room. “The door is, as always, unlocked.”

Minerva McGonagall opened the door and entered the room, and Albus saw that she was, as usual, not impressed by his little games. It was a pity, too, Albus thought. When one reached his age, games like these were what made life enjoyable.

But his pleasant mood shattered when Minerva threw down a letter on his desk, sealed and unopened, and his heart sank. He didn't have to even read the front to know who the letter was addressed to, but he did anyway as he turned it over, and the words ‘Harry Potter, Location Unknown’ flashed at him in emerald ink.

“All of the letters have been sent out,” Minerva said crisply, then gestured to the letter in his hand, her eyes face softening. “Every letter apart from this one, Albus.”

"Then Harry Potter did not receive his letter," Albus sighed wearily, his age showing as he slumped into his seat, his face suddenly gaining wrinkles as a tired frown appeared on his face.

Minerva took a seat, her back straight and stiff as she continued talking.

"The owl took the letter and started to fly around the castle, uncertain of where to go. It did this several times for at least half-an-hour before it suddenly started flying in a direction. I thought it had found him but less than a minute later, it came back, screeching in fear. I found it hiding in the owlery and it won't come out. Hagrid had a look at the poor thing and said that something must have spooked it badly."

"Then Harry is still being hidden away from us," Albus murmured, steeping his fingers together and resting his chin in his hands. "And we still cannot find him."

"None of your spells have been able to find him," Minerva said and placed a comforting arm on Albus', her face soft with sympathy. "Are you even sure that he is still alive?"

"I do not believe fate would let Harry Potter die so easily," Albus replied, a touch of mystery appearing in his voice and his eyes twinkled briefly with unspoken secrets. "No, he is still alive, I am certain."

Minerva frowned but nodded her head slowly, trusting his judgement and word.

"But regardless if he is alive or not, Harry will not be coming to Hogwarts this year," She said and her voice grew brisk as she continued. "Now, we need to talk about the stone and how we are going to protect it."

Albus slowly nodded and the age drained from his face as he focussed his mind on the more immediate situation, schemes and plans already forming up as he turned to his deputy and began speaking.

## Chicago

Harry was in the middle of his breakfast, thick and golden pancakes coated with maple syrup, when there was a sharp rap on his door. He sighed, dropping his fork, and stood up from his small kitchen. As he made his way to the front door, he whipped his wand out and flicked it sharply, his mind barking an incantation, and the door to the large training room closed with a soft click, hiding it from view.

"Who is it?" He called out as he neared the door, irritation lacing his voice.

"It's Adam," The voice on the other side called, an older man by the sounds of the voice. "I need to talk to you."

Harry raised his eyebrows with slight surprise as he unlatched the door, tucking his wand up his sleeve and opening the door. Outside, in the dim hallway, stood a man in his fifty's with greying hair and a portly face. Harry cocked his head and a polite smile suddenly appeared on his face.

"Good morning, landlord," He greeted cheerfully, a beaming smile on his face.

"Ah, good morning Harry," The landlord said uncomfortably, shying away from Harry's gaze as he fidgeted nervously on his feet. "Do you...um...have a minute or so to talk?"

Harry nodded slowly and stepped out the apartment, his eyes flickering up and down the hallway, but he was alone and he allowed himself to relax a smidgen. He turned back to Adam and gestured for him to continue.

"The thing is Harry," The man began, clearing his throat uncomfortably. "I like you. You're quiet, non-demanding, you don't have a lot of noise and you never bother me for anything. You're a good kid who's made the best out of his parent's death. I still don't know why you came to this apartment, I mean, with your inheritance, you could have gone to the very best place in all of Chicago."

"I like this apartment," Harry said, shrugging and smiling. "It's...quaint."

"It's not that quaint," The man said quickly, shaking his head. "I mean, you don't even have electricity in their. I don't even want to know how you keep your food cold."

"I order out a lot," Harry admitted. He frowned, his brows furrowing as he stared at the man in front of him. "What's the problem, Adam? You seem...jumpy."

"I can't keep you here anymore," The man said abruptly. "I just landed this new deal with the council and it's technically illegal to have you here. If they find out that I helped you forge the paperwork to this place, I could loose the deal. I think....I think you should move out."

Harry blinked, surprise and dismay showing on his face. He let his emerald eyes glisten as he stared at Adam with total shock and betrayal, who glanced away, a guilty look on his face.

"Y-You're joking, right?" Harry said slowly, his bottom lip trembling. "Your kicking me out?"

"Look, Harry, you've got plenty of money," Adam said quickly. "I'm sure you can find another place soon enough."

Harry didn't answer him as he opened his apartment door and went inside, leaving the landlord in the hallway alone. For a moment, Adam hesitated, as if he considered going in after him, but he sighed remorsefully and turned away, ready to leave. But the door opened again and Harry stepped out, his hand clamped around a wad of hundred-dollar bills.

"Will this cover next months rent?" Harry asked, letting a hint of desperation and vulnerability to show on his face as shoved the money under Adam's nose.

Adam blinked with shock and with trembling hands, slowly took the money, counting it roughly in his head as he thumbed through it. He

eyed Harry hesitantly, and seeing the pleading expression on the young boys face, sighed.

“Sure, Harry, this covers next months rent,” He said slowly. “I’m sorry for distressing you like this. I hope you have a wonderful day today.”

“Thanks,” Harry said, allowing a beaming smile of gratitude to appear on his face. He turned to step back into his apartment when Adam spoke up again.

“Oh, Harry? I know its not you, but there have been some reports of some pretty major armed robberies up in the northern suburbs of Chicago. They say it’s a kid behind it, described a bit like you actually. Just be careful and make sure you keep your nose clean. I wouldn’t want the police to be knocking around here, alright?”

“Cross my heart,” Harry said, thumping a hand on his small chest as he dazzled the man with another beaming smile before he closed the apartment door.

The instant he did, his smiled dropped and a look of irritation and annoyance appeared on his face.

“Arsehole,” He muttered as he locked the door and made his way back into the kitchen. “Where the hell do you think I got the money from in the first place, moron?”

He eyed his now-cold breakfast with a look of disgust and with a flick of his wand, sent the plastic plate flying through the air and into the rubbish bin. He sighed, rubbing his hand through his hair. He had just given the old man over three-quarters of his money, triple the rate of which he normally paid for the apartment. He would need to scout some areas to obtain some more money, but first, it was time to see a fairy about a demon.

Later that day, Harry flicked his wand, a simple levitating charm rolling off his lips as he walked from the small, adjoining kitchen and into the large and relatively bare training room. Behind him trailed a floating tray, which held a small cup of yoghurt and a fruit salad of fresh fruit, the perfect bait for one trying to lure and capture a faery. He floated the tray down into the middle of the small, summoning circle in the centre of the room and, while humming absently, bent down and held out his left hand, his wand clasped in his right. With a small flick and a murmured incantation, the wand tip suddenly glinted with strange silver light and Harry, still humming, ran it across his hand.

Skin parted where the wand tip touched and droplets of blood dripped from his hand, dropping into the small cup of yoghurt. Red stained the white surface as Harry held out his hand, watching as Meciél worked her dark powers through his body, sealing up the small cut in only a few seconds. He flexed his hand, feeling no twinge of pain, and then bent down to the yoghurt, picking up a spoon from the tray. With a few quick stirs, the blood quickly disappeared as it mixed with the yoghurt, while Harry smiled in satisfaction.

When trying to summon any creature, faery or demon, there were two things that were absolutely essential in trapping and containing them. First, you needed a true name. For demons, this usually wasn't a problem as they were only too eager to give out their names and allow themselves to be summoned. It gave them more chances to barter for power and gain more souls for their underworld. For faeries, however, true names were a lot harder to obtain and Harry got the impression that Meciél had gone to a lot of trouble many decades back to acquire this particular faeries name. The second thing you needed was a magical circle to hold them. Unlike demons, faeries played by different rules and the magical circle used to restrain them needed a small sacrifice in order to temporarily bind the being in the mortal realm. This was when Harry's blood came into it. When the fairy consumed or tasted the yoghurt and touched the blood, the sacrifice was acknowledged and the circle would close up, leaving it trapped for Harry's purposes.

“Does this look right to you?” Harry murmured out loud, his voice echoing through the quiet apartment. From within his mind, Meciél stirred and answered him.

‘Yes, beloved. I can see nothing wrong with the summoning circle. Remember to keep your magic flowing into it, but do not activate it until the fairy has taken consumed the sacrifice.’

Harry nodded and took a deep breath, and then called out the name of the faery he wanted to summon. It was a series of lilting musical syllables far too complex for the human ear to decipher alone. The closest and most approximate English-sounding name that Harry could recognise was ‘Cessbulby’. The words reverberated around the room as Harry leached his power into his voice, making it compulsive and binding, and then he waited patiently, standing silently at the back of the room. If he had been trying to capture a faery without letting it know that it was being captured, then he would have hidden the circle, allowing it to wonder in and trap itself with the lure of food. But, this time at least, he was making no attempt to hide his actions and was literally yanking it from its home in the Nevernever to the apartment, not even giving the faery a chance to escape.

Suddenly, from within the summoning circle, a faint silvery glow started flashing into the air, growing brighter and brighter with each passing second. From within this silvery glow came a showering cloud of sparkling silver motes, which fell to the ground, disappearing as it touched the wood with soft pops and short, tiny blinks of light. The glow grew brighter and brighter until a flash of red and blue burst forward, and a female faery appeared. She had silver dragonfly's wings sprouting from her back, flapping quickly as she hovered over the wooden floor. Her body was tiny, no bigger than six inches, but distinctly humanoid and beautiful. A silver nimbus of ambient light surrounded her, highlighting her fae charms as her shaggy, silken little mane of pinkish-red hair swayed on the power of her own flapping wings. Her eyes, a bright blue set of orbs, were furious as she made a loud squeaking noise of anger, sounding more childish than annoying.

However, her anger almost evaporated as she sniffed the air, her face suddenly growing both excited and wary. She looked down and

Harry could hear her gasp with excitement and hunger as she spotted the food. He ducked his head out from the next room, watching closely as the small, immortal being glanced around furtively and hovered down to the plate. The faery rubbed her little stomach and slowly dragged her finger through the small cup of yoghurt, licking her lips as she brought the dripping digit to her mouth and sucked on it. The instant she did, Harry focussed a slither of power into the circle and heard it close with a little snap.

The faery at once realised that she had been trapped and let out a shrill, high-piercing scream as she jumped into the air, her wings flapping furiously, Clouds of silver motes, her faery dust, blew into the air as she zoomed forward with great speed, almost a blur of light and noise as she tried to escape. But the circle shimmered with dark-reddish hues of magic as the faery struck into it, puffs of sparkling dust exploding from her body as she fell, landing on the ground roughly. She sat up, her blue eyes glowing with her anger as they searched the room for the one who had trapped her. It was at this time that Harry revealed himself.

"You!" The Faery demanded angrily, pointing a little finger at Harry. "Who are you? Release me at once!"

Harry seemed to consider it, his eyes flicking upwards as a thoughtful expression appeared on his face.

"Um...no," He responded mockingly and watched with a certain degree of amusement as the faery screamed out in anger, folding her arms as she flew back into the air, anger etched into every pore of her cute little face, her hair flicking back as she spoke, menace dripping from her voice.

"Release me or I shall strike at you with all of the power of Winter," She hissed threateningly, her words anything but cute. "Your house will fall under my mighty power; crumble into ice as I smite you with pox and boils! I will tear you from limb to limb, deliver your blood to the trolls, have the ogres devour your innards and place your head on the stalactites of the icy tombs! You will know true pain at my hand and power, but you can avoid your fate if you release me now!!"

Harry blinked, frowning in surprise and shock as the small faery glared at him angrily, her arms still folded. The nimbus of silver light flared around her and if Harry had been a metre or so smaller, he might have found her a little more intimidating. As such, the faery being trapped behind a solid and impenetrable magical barrier, Harry pursed his lips and shook his head.

“No,” He said slowly. “I really don’t think I will.”

The faery let out a shrill cry of anger and flew back to the ground, landing on the tray with a dull thud. She glared up at him, anger and the promise of pain in her soulless eyes as she inspected the barrier. Finally, after a few moments, she let out another cry of anger. “Release me!” She demanded angrily, her blue eyes flaring with a powerful blue glow.

“No,” Harry said quietly and firmly

The faery’s demeanour changed then and a petulant expression came over her face, much like a spoiled child who had been sent to her room without dinner, and the anger faded from her face, being replaced with an immature sulkiness.

“Release me!” The faery cried again, but in a whining and sulky tone instead of anger. “I am a worker of the Winter Lady Maeve. If she were to find out what you have done to me, she would hunt you down!”

“I know you work for Maeve,” Harry answered as he sat down, crossing his legs and peering at the faery with bright green eyes. “I want to know if you’ve overheard anything lately.”

“I’m very busy!” The faery protested, sniffing haughtily as it turned away from Harry’s gaze. “Let me go!”

“C’mon,” Harry said, a smile curving his lips as he watched the sulky little faery. “We used to do this all the time, Cessbulby.”

The faery, Cessbulby, swung her gaze back to Harry and suddenly eyed him in a new light as comprehension dawned on her little face.

“Meciel!” She howled angrily. “It’s you again! You always do this, always, always, always! I remember now!”

Harry watched the reaction without too much concern. From what Meciel had told him, faeries such as this had bad memories, as you would if you were an immortal being, and needed a bit of jogging to remember the last time they had been tricked and forced into a magical circle.

“You did it to me again!” Cessbulby cried out as she stamped her little foot down on the tray, a cloud of silver faery dust billowing out from the impact.

The slam made a sharp, tapping noise, rattling the small cup of yoghurt and Cessbulby suddenly seemed to remember the reason why she had fallen into the trap and whirled around, eyeing the fruit and yoghurt hungrily as she licked her lips. Her eyes darted back to Harry and the food, indecision on her face, until she seemed to come to a decision.

“Now that you’ve dragged me here and I am hungry,” Cessbulby said slowly. “I suppose I could take a little break.”

Harry smiled and gestured to the food.

“It’s all yours,” He said enticingly. “Of course, if you’re eating here, we may as well talk to each other.

Cessbulby eyed him again and smiled. Her entire face lit up as she whirled around and dove for the food with a greedy look on her face, scooping in tiny handfuls of the dairy product and shoving it into her mouth.

Harry watched Cessbulby with a look of bewildered disgust as she tore into the fruit, dipping large chunks of mango into the yoghurt and swallowing it whole, cramming more into her mouth than a being her size should have been able to. Her stomach was looking a little bloated as Cessbulby licked her fingers, her blue eyes swinging his way as she continued talking.

“And Meg told me that Toot said that he had heard O’Reilly say that Anthadia, who’s one of Winter’s bastion commanders, lost an entire scout unit in summer’s territory,” She was saying cheerfully as she reached for another grape with her little hands, ripping into it with her sharp nails and holding it to her head. Grape juice oozed from the hole as Cessbulby chugged it down, fruity liquid spilling all over her tiny clothes.

“Anyway, Maeve was so angry with him that she ripped off both of his arms and threw him down a volcano to burn in punishment for a few years,” Cessbulby concluded, tearing at the flesh of the grape with greedy hands.

“What about the Order of the Blackened Denarius?” Harry asked quickly, before Cessbulby could continue on with her strangely fascinating but totally irrelevant stories of Winter Court politics. “Has Maeve watched anything with them in it?”

Cessbulby shrugged carelessly, reaching for the last grape and gnawing on it. Harry waited as she ripped open the flesh and sculled the juice down, licking her lips when she was finished and directing her gaze back at Harry.

“Nothing special,” She said cheerfully, shrugging, and then let out a small burp, patting her mouth absently. “There are still the fights between Nicodemus and his lot and the other Fallen who won’t follow him. Big fight up in the icy country the other night, it got us all excited!”

“Anything else?” Harry pressed firmly, his eyes serious and intent as he leaned forward. “Something closer to this place?”

Cessbulby frowned, considering the question carefully as she cocked her head, her expression thoughtful. This lasted for about a second before a blinding smile came over her face.

“Nope,” She answered cheerfully as she stood up, wiping her mouth on her sleeve, her gleaming silver wings fluttering behind her. Harry

frowned but nodded as he also stood up, a polite smile washing over his face.

“Did you like your meal?” He asked courteously.

Cessbulby took a deep breath, her head rising as a superior and haughty expression flickered onto her face.

“I deem your offering acceptable to a faery of my stature,” She stated imperiously. “Now, I must leave and attend to my duties. Release me at once, Denarian.”

Harry bowed his head, hiding his mockery and putting a serious expression on his face as he moved forward, preparing to shatter the magical integrity of the circle with a physical object. He casually wave his hand through the gleaming dark-red circle of magic and saw it splutter out, the magic flickering and cackling as it lost its form and dissipated.

“I hope you enjoyed the break,” Harry said to Cessbulby, who fluttered in the air in front of him. “We should do this more often.”

Cessbulby narrowed her eyes, staring at him with a trace of suspicion as she hesitated, before a brilliant and somewhat sly smile came over her face.

“Oh yes, but not too often, methinks, or else I might get into trouble. Now, I will depart from here,” She said imperiously and ruined her self-absorbed expression as winked a luminous blue at Harry and allowed an almost-childish cute grin to appear on her face. “Meg told me that they had caught a summer fairy in Winter so we’re going to go and rip its wings off. It will be fun!”

Cessbulby ignored Harry’s blink of shock as she disappeared in a soft sparkle of faery dust, silver motes of shining magic falling to the ground in a heap of wave as the small faery travelled back to the Nevernever. Harry watched this as he sat back, a slightly bewildered look on his face.

“It’s wrong that something so cute can be so...bloodthirsty,” He said out loud.

‘It’s a Winter fairy, icy, cold and totally without remorse,’ Meciél said, humour laced in her voice. “What did you expect, beloved?”

Harry gave a small shrug as he brought out his wand, flicking a casual levitation charm and sending the now filthy and food splattered tray into the kitchen as Meciél continued talking.

‘Congratulations, beloved. You have just gained a powerful source of reliable information, especially since that faery that works close to the Winter Lady.’

Harry gave a snort as he turned the water on, letting it fill the sink.

“She didn’t tell me anything about the Fallen that tried to bump me off the other night,” He said as he begun scrubbing the dirty tray with a sponge. “I only just managed to get away from him.”

‘He took you by surprise, beloved, but I know him. He is in one of the lower Fallen, driven to madness by the Void to where he was banished.’ Meciél said, disgust and revulsion echoing in her voice. ‘He cares nothing more than for the taste of blood, for violence and indulging himself in his pleasures.’

“Who do you think sent him?” Harry asked as he moved onto the next plate, turning the tap off and reaching for the detergent bottle, emptying it into the sink.

‘He was most likely sent by Deirdre to hunt you down and kill you,’ Meciél answered thoughtfully. ‘It may have been on her father’s orders, but I do not think that Nicodemus would have sent such an unreliable weapon to kill you. Deirdre is probably nursing her wounded pride but has other matters to occupy herself with.’

“Next time, I’ll be ready for him,” Harry said grimly, scrubbing at the plate furiously.

'You could defeat him should you go prepared, beloved. He will attack with anger and rage, not with strategy and cunning. But while your demonic form is very powerful, it brings with it a great rage and hatred. You must strive to keep them under control if you wish to win.'

Harry nodded thoughtfully, a pensive expression on his face.

"I suppose we'll see if I can manage that when he attacks me again," He said heavily, placing the other dish on the rack.

'I have faith in you, beloved. I always do.'

Harry smiled softly, and then snorted as he shook his head in amusement.

"You know, you're not as nasty as you try to make yourself out to be," He said smugly and he could feel Meciél's amusement within him.

'Perhaps.'

Harry finished up the last of the dishes in content and comfortable silence, drying his hands on the ragged tea-towel and leaving the kitchen, making his way back into the large, empty training room.

'Have you considered using the circle to summon the demon again?'

"I got to find a schmuck to use as a sacrifice, don't I?" Harry asked, pursing his lips. "Nah, we'll see if we can lure this guy out first and I have an idea already. So, Meciél, do you like McDonalds?"

Later that night

"Welcome to McDonald, how may I serve you?"

Harry stared at the teenage girl in front of him, eyeing that bright phoney smile with a barely hidden shudder as he glanced around the small restaurant, which was mostly empty at this time of a night. A group of teenage boys with faces of metal piercing and chains and sporting dark clothes sat at one table, talking softly with each other.

On the other side of the restaurant, Harry noticed a balding and chubby man with a briefcase devouring a burger, while in front of him, the girl continued smiling as four other teenagers dressed in the uniform worked behind her, cooking up fries and burgers.

“Hey, what do you want?” The girl prompted gently, a real smile coming over her face as she brushed her ratty, sweaty hair out of her eyes, and gazed at the kid in front of her

Harry made a humming as he frowned at the overheard menu. With a look of mock-indecision, he reached into his dark raincoat, gripping the cold metallic handle tightly.

“Well, to start off with, I’d like...” Harry trailed off, his face marked with childish hesitancy, before it hardened into something colder, something darker, and he brought the revolver out of his pocket and aimed it at the girls head. “The money. Yeah, I’m going to have to go with the money.”

The girl made a squeaking noise, her eyes wide with fear as her mouth clamped shut, her lips pressing together until they were white. Her eyes darted around the room as Harry gestured pointedly at the register with the gun and she opened it up with shaky hands, piling bills of money out into a takeaway bag. Harry noticed movement from the corner of his eye and turned his head, seeing the chubby man rising to his feet, his empty tray in his hand.

“Hey!” Harry shouted, swinging the gun at him. The man looked up in puzzlement and visibly started, his chins wobbling as he noticed the gleaming barrel of the gun levelled towards him. “Sit the fuck down, fatty!”

The man quickly sat down, panic and fear easily visible on his face as Harry swung around, levelling the gun at the teenage kids, who had looked up at his shouting.

“And you, you fucking punks! Sit back down! You’re not going anywhere!” He snarled, letting the darkness flash in his eyes as he watched the teenagers hurriedly sit down again.

He turned back to the register, seeing the frightened girl shove a fistful of money down the bag, her eyes blinking away tears as her gaze flickered between him and the register. Behind her, the other workers were curiously absent, probably trying to stay out of sight and ring the police.

“Alright, that’s enough!” Harry snarled and snatched the bag from the girl and shoved it into his coat, while the girl flinched at his tone and sudden action. “Now, there’s one more thing I want you to do.”

“W-What is it?” The girl stammered out, her dark eyes welling with tears.

“Take this down and don’t get it wrong,” Harry said clearly. “Now, I want a medium quarter-pounder meal,” Harry begun. “I don’t want coke, though; make it a chocolate thickshake instead. With the fries, I want them heavily salted...lots of salt, alright?”

The girl blinked in astonishment but one glance from Harry made her straighten up in fear as she ducked her head, nodding quickly.

“One medium quarter-pounder meal, chocolate thickshake, fries with extra salt,” She rattled off quickly, her mind easily slipping into the more comfortable routine to the point where she couldn’t help herself. “Would you like anything else with that?”

Harry stared at her as she flushed, embarrassment spreading over her cheeks, and then nodded.

“Yeah, there are two things,” He said calmly. “First, get me some cookies....no, not that box...yeah, that’s the one. As for the second thing, I want to know...”

Here Harry swivelled his gun around, turning his head as he levelled the revolver around one of the teenagers, who had sneaked out of his seat and had crept behind Harry.

“What you’re doing out of your seat.” He finished coldly.

The teenager gulped, but forced a defiant look on his face.

“That’s not a real gun,” He tried to sneer, but failed miserably, his tone uncertain. “I’m not an idiot, for fuck’s sake! C’mon, you’re only a little boy for...”

Harry rolled his eyes, lowered the barrel of the gun and pressed the trigger. A deafening roar burst through the restaurant and the boy gave a scream of fear, jumping back as the ground near his feet exploded in a tiny geyser of dust, a relatively large hole appearing in the floor.

“Do you really want to die for a medium quarter-pounder meal, with a shake instead of a coke and some oversalted fries?” Harry asked the teen, derision on his face. “I mean, is that how you planned to go out?”

The boy slowly shook his head and without any further prompting from Harry, quickly made his way back to his seat and collapsed in it, his face pale and shaky, while Harry turned back to the girl and grabbed his meal.

“Now, I’m leaving now,” Harry said clearly and loudly. He held up his gun, the barrel still emitting small wisps of smoke from the recent discharge. “If anybody leaves, anybody, I will shoot you. Do we understand this?”

The girl in front of him nodded quickly, her hair bobbing up and down as Harry ran his eyes over the room, meeting the gaze of everybody there. He allowed himself to give a small, smug smile and quickly turned and walked to the exit, opening the door into the cold darkness and slipping outside.

Outside, Harry gave a small snicker as his face caved in, the coldness and darkness fleeing as quickly as it had come as he fumbled with the bag, his gun still in hand, and munched on a couple of the fries.

‘Was that really necessary?’

“Oh, c’mon,” Harry protested in amusement as he walked away from the building. “We got what we needed done and I got some money and food out of it. They won’t be stepping out of the building anytime soon.”

‘Beloved!’

At Meciél’s sudden warning, Harry looked forward and allowed his eyes to widen in shock. There in front of him, bathed under the light of the nearby lamppost, stood a man. He had bloodshot eyes and a fanatical, drugged-up look on his face, his body lanky and gaunt, but also strong. Madness shined in his eyes and he bared his teeth out threateningly, showing off the permanent bloodstains.

For a moment, the two of them stood there, staring at each other, before the man let out an animalistic growl and started to move forward. Harry dropped the bag, his dinner forgotten, and raised his gun, his stance instinctively shifting as he fired.

Loud, booming roars echoed into the night sky as the gun flared with bright light. A bullet slammed into the man, knocking him to the side as he scrambled across the ground, taking cover behind the nearest car as Harry continued firing, a few bullets striking into the car. The moment Harry heard a click as he pressed the trigger he did what any smart boy would have done.

He ran.

Harry ran as fast as he could, ducking behind a car as he tore through the parking lot. Adrenaline and excitement pounded into his veins as he heard the man behind him chasing after him, heavy footsteps accompanied by frenzied, snarling pants, the man sounding more like a dog than a man. Harry didn’t turn his head back as he sprinted down the street and turned right at one of the alleyways. The man chased after him, bloodlust shining in his eyes as he let out a vicious snarl, an impossibly deep noise coming from the back of his throat as the dim, logical part of his mind remembered that alley was one-way.

Harry suddenly stopped and spun around, the fear and surprise gone from his eyes and replaced with a look of ruthlessness and determination, his eyes glinting in the dark night. As the man turned the corner, spittle and drool flying out of his mouth, Harry let an arrogant smirk wash over his face as the man stopped; his eyes suddenly cautious as he found his target standing in the middle of alley, seemingly unconcerned.

"You're an idiot for coming back to the same place where you first attacked me," Harry said coldly, raising his left hand as the jewel on the ring glinted with dark, powers, a searing heat roaring into his veins with a rush of pleasure and power. "Did you really think I wouldn't be prepared?"

Without another word, Harry focussed his magic and let the searing power roar out of him, building up in his trap as he awaited the right chance to activate it. The man snarled, stepping forward and placing himself exactly where Harry wanted him. With a flare of light, Harry activated his magical circle and watched with cruel, green eyes as a dome of glimmering hues of dark-red and purple magic enveloped the other Fallen, who let out a piercing scream of pain. The temperature in the alley suddenly increased as Harry poured his power into the circle. The other man's skin started to sizzle as the heat inside the circle dramatically increased and he was still screaming when he began to change, an almost instantaneous change as he grew, shaggy, dark fur enveloping his body as a thick, cruel muzzle jutted out from his mouth, curved fangs sprouting out.

In almost three seconds, a massive dog-like creature stood where the man had. Two sets of glowing eyes glared at Harry with demonic hatred, one set glowing blue, the other cherry red, and the beast let out a loud roar, the sound echoing in the alley. Harry grimaced as he tried to hold the circle, dark powers flowing through him in a torrent of cascading heat, but the creature thrashed, snarling and snapping out with its teeth at the barrier and Harry gave a small cry of pain as he lost control. For a second, the barrier flickered out of existence and it was all the time the creature needed to jump out, advancing towards Harry with a vicious snarl. It jumped forward, fully preparing to rip Harry's throat out when the young boy changed, bony wings springing from his back a thick bone-plated tail bursting from Harry's

back. A set of glowing silver-eyes appeared below his green ones and thick, powerful arms shot out as Harry, now a bone-wrym, snarled, backhanding the other Fallen away.

The Fallen let out a loud whine as he was pitched through the air, landing on his side as he struck the pavement. The Fallen demonic dog shook its head dazedly as it climbed back up to all fours, rage and hatred flashing through its eyes as it whirled around and charged for Harry again. Harry let out his own roar of pain as he swiped at the demonic dog, missing it as it sunk its incredibly powerful fangs into one of his legs, but a vicious slash with one of his wings managed to pry the demonic dog off him, giving the thing a good kick as he hurled it down the alley again.

The dog landed roughly, a soft whimpering noise coming from its mouth as it struck the concrete with great force. It staggered up as Harry roared at it, a demonic rage clouding his mind as the pain, no matter how slight, dove deep into his primal instincts. He could feel a haze of power come over his mind, he had never been stronger, faster, and more powerful as he was now and he let out another triumphant roar, the noise echoing in the alleyway. The dog let loose his own snarl, injured but insane as it staggered up, madness shining in its eyes as the two demonic creatures prepared to do battle again.

At least, they had planned to.

It was at that moment that two figures, men, strode into view. Harry glared at them, his eyes burning with demonic rage and bloodlust, while the demonic dog did the same, baring its teeth as it snarled ferociously, saliva dripping from elongated incisors. The men, however, didn't flee or even shy away as they turned to the demons, their faces stern and hard.

"Surrender now, Denarians," commanded the tallest of them, a Russian with dark skin and heavy eyes. His voice was strong and resonating with something odd undertones of something powerful laced throughout it and for a moment, Harry could have thought he had heard a barrage of loud trumpets playing a single, crisp, clear note.

The demonic dog snarled and at once, leapt for them, his fangs glinting in the moonlight as he flew towards them. The two men reacted simultaneously, sidestepping to either side of the flying dog, and swords suddenly appeared in their hands. The water-patterned steel of the blade glowed with a steady silver flame that slowly grew brighter as the men moved as one, the blades whistling through the air and slicing into the demonic dog's thick hide with ease. The dog gave a loud, high-pitched whine as it collapsed to the ground, its eyes pained yet angrier and more crazed than before.

"Stop resisting," commanded one of the men, who sported dark hair sprayed with silver and a well-trimmed beard. "There is always a chance for repentance!"

The wounded Fallen, despite his injuries, snapped out with his teeth, spittle flying to the ground, and the man took a hasty step backwards as his sword flew up, slicing into the thick, furry snout. Silver fire flared in the alleyway as the blade cut into the other Fallen and the man stepped back as the demonic dog crumpled to the ground, blood oozing from its latest and undeniably fatal wound.

"You!" called out the Russian man, his gruff voice thick with accent. "Surrender now!"

Harry let out a defiant roar, his demon form clouding his mind with bloodlust and demonic rage. Distantly, in the back of his mind, he could hear a woman saying something frantically, her voice pleading with him to listen to her, but the more primal instincts of his brain reacted the obvious threat in the man's voice first and lashed out with his wing, bone as sharp as steel lancing out towards the man. The man stepped back, his sword flaring with blazing silver fire as he parried the blow and Harry let out an enormous scream of agony, his bestial roar echoing out through the night as the blade sliced through the bone, tearing through the powerful dark enchantments and Denarian power with ease.

He staggered back, his mind clouded with pain and rage as he lashed out again, his armoured tail flicking through the air, tearing through a brick wall with ease, and slamming down on the ground. The man dodged this blow, throwing himself to the side as Harry's tail smashed

into the concrete, while the other man advanced, his silver sword glimmering through the air as it struck into his tail and shattered the armoured bone, diving deep into the vulnerable flesh. Harry let out another scream of pain, liquid silver flame seemingly running through his body, and staggered backwards, lashing out with his fists as he avoided the blades of the men as they surrounded him.

‘You must stop, beloved! They are Knights of the Cross; their blades can cut through your most fearsome enchantments! Cease your attack!’

But Harry was too far gone, his mind clouded with his baser instincts as he continued to rage, fists and tail smashing into the surroundings brick walls and building sides as the men, the Knights, moved forward with deadly grace, slicing away at him, attacking his exposed flanks and leaving searing trails of blood and silver fire as their swords flared with holy light.

Eventually, after thirty seconds of complete and utter madness, one of the knights moved forward, his sword poised. Harry glared down at him with his two sets of eyes, power flowing through his weakened body as he raised his fist, preparing to smash the man into the ground, when the second knight darted forward, his blade slicing through the air with a deadly hiss. Silver fire blossomed in Harry’s chest as he let out his third and final scream of pain, agony coursing through his veins as he collapsed to the ground, his body making a loud thud as it slammed into the concrete, while the knight pulled his glowing blade from his chest, standing above him grimly.

‘Transform, beloved! This form is about to die! You must transform!’

The agony had washed away his rage and Harry closed both sets of eyes, dispelling the remains of his once-mighty enchantments. His body shrank, his tail disappearing and his one remaining wing of bone melting into his back. After a second or two, Harry, fully human, collapsed to the ground, silver fire still burning in his chest. Clarity suddenly returned to him and he let out a quiet moan of pain as he rolled over, his green eyes wide as he frantically touched his chest. His fingers touched something wet and when he drew them back, he

saw crimson blood, and he let out a quieter moan, his mind already drifting away as his pain dulled.

“Meciel...” He muttered softly to himself, his voice barely a whisper as he fumbled for one of his weapons, the gun, the wand, the sword hidden under his long rain-coat, anything! But his fingers were clammy, shaking and barely moving, so he lay there silently, his emerald eyes staring up at the beautiful night sky.

‘Beloved!

Harry heard Meciel’s cry of concern and distress as something came into his view, blocking the stars and moon from above, and he blinked. Dazed emerald eyes stared up at the knights as they approached him, both looking shocked, surprised and decidedly grim. They glanced at him and then each other, their mouths moving quickly as they talked to one another. Harry tried to listen in, he really did, but he could only hear bursts of the conversation, as if he were losing his hearing.

“Just a child....still a Fallen....will you be the one to kill him...Still one of the black Denarian, Meciel probably conquered his mind...what do you suggest?”

“Going to murder me now?” Harry taunted weakly, his emerald eyes struggling to focus in front of him. “Go on then, finish it off you bast...!”

He never finished the sentence as he burst into a fit of coughs, loud, choking sounds suddenly sounding very loud to his ears. He could feel a thick liquid escaping his lips, staining his white teeth and he shuddered, closing his pained emerald eyes as tears welled in them, trickling down his cheeks. Slowly, and with great effort, he reached up with a shaky hand and clasped his chest, where the coin of Meciel hung on a heavily enchanted and charmed necklace.

‘I cannot heal this, beloved, not this soon after the sword. Heaven’s wrath still lingers within you, it is clouding my ability to....beloved? Beloved, listen to my voice! No, listen...don’t fall asleep....don’t...asleep...I...dieing...time.....beloved’

And that was when Harry's world went black.

The first thing Harry felt as he slowly drifted back into consciousness was warmth. He was lying somewhere that was both warm and extremely comfortable. He murmured something sleepily, rolling over in the bed and attempting to shift the covers above him. He frowned, his eyes still closed and tugged at his hand. There was something cold and metallic clasped around it. It was at this time that Harry noticed two things. First, the memories of the fight with the insane Denarian and the Knights rushed back into his mind like a flashing blur of colours and sounds, and his eyes shot open as he shot up from the bed. Secondly, to him, the world had never smelled more beautiful. His sharp green eyes flickered first to his arm as he noticed a pair of steel handcuffs had bound him to the metal bed posts, then around the room as he took in his surroundings. He was lying on a small but comfortable bed, pale-blue sheets covering his body. The door was open and the walls were painted in a bright, yellow colour, which seemed to glow as sunlight beamed in through the window, bright, blue sky clearly visible.

He frowned in confusion as he used his free hand to lift up the covers. He had been undressed and was now wearing a pair of old, faded pyjamas. When Harry lifted the up his top, he saw that a bandage, stained with small droplets of blood, had been carefully wrapped around his chest where he had been stabbed. He dropped the covers and frowned, breathing in the fresh air as he puzzled about what was different.

“Meciel, what do you think?” He asked out loud, his voice wary as he glanced at the open door again.

There was no answer from within him and Harry frowned, partially closing his eyes as he reached out with his mind, seeking the unused parts of his brain where Meciel usually resided. A sudden wave of roaring shock ran through him as he found nothing, no warm glow that usually indicated her presence, no searing heat that indicated her powers, and he suddenly realised why the air smell so fresh. The bitter, acrid smell of sulphur that had accompanied him everywhere, to which he had adapted so he could barely notice it anymore, was completely gone and with it was Meciel’s presence.

With trembling hands, panic flowing through him and his cheek pale with shock, Harry almost ripped off the pyjama top as he fumbled around for his necklace, the one with Meciél's coin bound to it. But the necklace was gone. The coin was gone. Meciél was gone and Harry suddenly felt very alone and very afraid as he closed the covers around him, eyeing the door with a mixture of panic. He was all alone and obviously a captive of the Knights of the Cross. Meciél had told him that their order had been founded to destroy the Denarians and Harry wondered with a spike of fear if he was being held for an execution.

"Hey! Where the hell am I?" Harry yelled out, his eyes wide with emotion as he tugged at the handcuffs again. He closed his eyes, desperately trying to feel for any shreds of power that he could use to free himself, but he found nothing. With Meciél gone, Harry was once again weak and defenceless. Hell, he couldn't even use his wand-magic because he didn't have a wand with him!

"Hey! Let me go!" He shouted again, panicked anger increasing the pitch of his voice. He gave one last tug at the cuffs, straining with all of his effort as he tried to squeeze his hand through it. Pain shot up his wrist as he pulled until Harry stopped it, a gasp of pain and exhaustion escaping him, and he flopped back onto the bed. He closed his eyes, beating away the tears that welled there and let out a soft sigh, trying to compose his emotions. Suddenly he heard small and light footsteps walking up the corridor and his eyes swung to the door as a young girl cautiously entered the room.

The first thing Harry noticed was the gleaming wand that was being pointed at him. The girl eyed him uncertainly and she held her wand awkwardly, as if she wasn't used to holding one. She seemed to be about his age, with long, blonde hair tied back into a ponytail and light grey eyes, which watched him with a mixture of curiosity and nervousness.

"You're awake then," The girl said, her grey eyes focussing on the handcuffs that bound him to the bedpost.

"Wow," Harry deadpanned, preferring sarcasm to panic as he tried to clear his mind of his emotions. "You're an observant one, aren't you?"

The girl didn't say anything, looking at him curiously. Harry cocked his eyebrows as her eyes roamed over him carefully; an open and curious look on her face.

"You're like me," She said slowly. "You're a witch."

"Wizard," Harry interjected scornfully.

"You use a wand," The girl continued. At Harry's' blink of surprise, she elaborated, her wand never leaving his form, although Harry personally thought that she probably wouldn't be able to do much with it. "We found it on you, you see."

"Well, then I can see how you might think that I'm a wand-wizard then." Harry said, sarcasm dripping from his voice as he began to relax an inch. The girl, while wielding a wand, didn't seem to be too dangerous and wasn't likely to start torturing him at any moments notice. "Given that you found my wand."

The girl ignored his sarcasm as she looked over him again, a puzzled frown coming to her face.

"You don't look like an evil demon," She said, bewilderment in her voice. "You look like a normal kid."

"And you don't look like a smart girl," Harry said bluntly, annoyance coming over his face as he waved his left hand at her in a dismissive manner. "So why don't you leave and go and get the bastard who stabbed me! Go on, go!"

The girl first looked startled and then annoyed at his attitude, but she backed out of the room, leaving Harry to his thoughts. He tugged at the cuffs again and gave a huff of frustration as they remained firmly attached to the bedposts. It was only a few moments later that more footsteps stomped up the corridor and Harry braced himself, readying himself for a confrontation with the man who had stabbed him. But the person who walked through the door was a tall, silken-blond and beautiful woman with a severe frown on her face. For a human, Harry privately admitted that she was quite beautiful, although not as

attractive as Meciél or Maeve. Her features strongly resembled the young girl that had been in the room a minute ago and she carried herself with a sense of strength.

Harry opened his mouth, ready to let out a cutting and sarcastic remark, but the woman interrupted him, folding her arms as she regarded him with a cold, chilly stare.

"My name is Charity and I don't want you here," said the woman, her voice even.

Harry started in surprise, staring at the woman with surprise.

"Well, good," He said slowly. "I don't want to be here. Just give me back my stuff and I'll get out of your hair."

Charity ignored him, her eyes shining with wariness as she continued.

"But my husband is a good man, decent man, and his conscience would not allow him to leave a child to die," The woman said, her eyes softening, a loving smile coming over her face. "Usually special elements of the Church take care of somebody who's been abused by the Fallen like you were. But Michael insisted that you stay here and recover. He feels very guilty about what happened to you."

"Was he the guy who stabbed me?" Harry asked, absently smoothing the covers over his chest, his fingers lingering where the bandage was. "Because that really hurt!"

"No," Charity shook her head, her hair swaying behind her back. "That was Sanya."

"Ah, the Russian," Harry murmured as something Meciél had told him flashed into his mind. A flicker of a smile curved his lips. "He used to be a host, didn't he? He rejected the coin."

Charity nodded, her eyes narrowing as Harry's face twisted with scorn, shaking his head in bewilderment.

"What an idiot," He said in derision. He blinked, frowning as something occurred to him. "Unless he had picked the coin of one of the really bad Fallen."

"Bad Fallen?" Charity echoed, staring at Harry with a strange expression.

"Yeah, insane and all that," Harry answered. "Kinda like that guy I was fighting...er....what happened to him anyway?"

"He died," Charity said faintly.

"Good," Harry said, a flare of satisfaction twisting in his gut. "I hope he suffered."

Charity stared at him as dawning comprehension came over her face and she took a step backwards, staring at him with a hint of coldness and surprise.

"You weren't enslaved, were you?" She asked in disbelief. "You picked up the coin by your own free will, didn't you?"

"Of course I did," Harry said, snorting at Charity's dismayed expression and surprise. "Meciel is the only one who cares for me in the shit hole of a world."

"My husband thought that by removing the coin, you would be free of the demons presence," Charity said, her voice hardening as she gazed at Harry with a mixture of disgust and wariness. "You can't free somebody who likes their prison," Harry said quietly, before he gestured to the handcuffs binding him to the bedposts. "You can free them if they're handcuffed to the bed though."

Charity smiled tightly and silently shook her head to Harry's request. He frowned and tried again, his expression clearing and smiling the picture of a child's innocence.

"What can I do?" He asked lightly. "I have no weapons, no wand, and no power."

Charity's face remained like carved marble; she clearly wasn't buying it and Harry sighed, his arms falling to the bed.

"So, what are you going to do with me now?" He asked bluntly, staring at Charity coldly as bitterness and resentment clouded his voice. "Because if it's an execution, then I want a fucking spectacular last meal."

"My husband will deal with you when he returns," Charity said, her voice hard and cold.

"He's not here?" Harry asked, blinking in surprise.

"He's currently out on a business appointment," Charity said and Harry could have sworn that he had heard a deep tone of worry and fear.

"Ah," Harry said with something like understanding. The Knight was probably out hunting down other Denarians like himself. Not that Harry cared, he knew that most Denarians had a grudge against Meciel and the more that the Knights killed then the safer he was going to be. Besides, with the Knight gone, not all was lost and perhaps he could find a way to escape.

He looked up as Charity turned around, walking for the door, and called out, his voice still bitter with resentment and sulkiness.

"If you're going to chain me up like a wild animal, could you at least feed me like one?" He said sourly. "Because I'm starving and I didn't get to eat my dinner."

"I'm sure I can arrange something," Charity said, somewhat coldly as she left the room.

Harry made an ugly face at her retreating back and settled back down into the bed, his thoughts racing. Although his face seemed calm, it didn't show the panic that he really felt. He was trapped in the home of a Knight, he was all alone and he was defenceless. Where was the coin of Meciel? Was it in this house? Had the Knight taken the coin with him? More importantly, how was he going to get it back?

Harry stared at the empty plate with a slight look of satisfaction as he let out a loud burp, chewing on the last of the extremely-delicious sandwich as he placed the plate aside. He rubbed his fully belly with contentment, before he turned back to what he had been doing for the past hour or so, tugging and pulling at the cuffs and bedposts. He ignored the pain in his wrists and hands as he desperately tried to free himself, the cold metal of the cuffs rubbing into his wrists, tearing at the sensitive skin. He couldn't stand this place any longer!

A little over three hours ago, Charity had come into the room, her face looking as if it had been carved in marble as she carried in fresh bandages. Harry wouldn't have really cared that the woman was helping him heal, hell; he would have thanked her had she not used iodine. The instant the brown liquid had touched his skin, a great flare of pain had risen in his belly and without Meciél to dampen the effects Harry had felt the full pain. A loud scream had risen in his throat and he had squirmed, the cuffs rattling on the bedpost as he lashed out with a foot, knocking the bottle over onto the ground and kicking hard enough to make Charity grunt as she held him down with far greater strength than he would have guessed the blonde woman possessed. She had returned with another bottle iodine and this time had swabbed really hard as Harry turned his head away, hissing with pain as he tried to keep the tears from welling into his eyes. It had been one of the most humiliating experiences in his life.

However, Harry would later claim that he would prefer humiliating over to boring and tedious when Charity returned a few minutes after changing his bandage with a thick book in her hands. Harry had stared, almost open-mouthed as the beautiful woman had sat down next to him and opened up the bible. Granted, the words didn't hurt him and the presence of the book wasn't dangerous to him in any way, even if he had still carried the coin of Meciél, but after five minutes of her lectures on the virtues of kindness and mercy, Harry was ready to snap. He had turned to the woman, his eyes blazing with anger, but Charity had seen him moving and quickly, but calmly, placed a small bottle of iodine on the bedside table. Harry had stared at the bottle, then at the woman, and then turned his head away in a huff, giving his wrist another tug as Charity smiled and continued reading from the book.

"The cuffs won't break."

Harry looked up, his bitter reminiscing coming to an end as a young voice interrupted him. Standing in the door way was the same young girl as before, her wand held in her hand tightly as she levelled it at him. A smaller girl, maybe eight years old with blonde pigtails and blue eyes, peeked from behind the eleven-year-old girl's legs, her face showing fear but childish stubbornness.

"Ya think?" He muttered under his breath, turning back to the cuffs and giving them one last tug, before he collapsed in his bed with a sigh as the two girls entered the room, staring at him as if he were a zoo animal. "You know, your mum's mean."

The older girl blinked, her grey eyes widening at his statement.

"Um...aren't you a demon?" The girl asked in slight confusion, her blonde ponytail glinting in the sunlight as she came closer to the bed.

"Sort of, yeah," Harry admitted.

"Then how can you call my mom mean?" The girl demanded bluntly, slight anger appearing on her face. "I mean, you kill people and stuff!"

"Well, yeah, but so far they've all deserved it," Harry said defensively and folded his arms, letting out a little huff. "Besides, I haven't tortured anybody before."

"Mom didn't torture you!" The little girl cried out, her eyes narrowing in anger as little splotches of red appeared on her cheeks.

"Like hell she didn't!" Harry exclaimed and narrowed his eyes, staring at the older girl with a serious expression. "Listen, you tell her that the more she reads that boring book of hers, the more I feel the urge to sacrifice a human being to the demons!"

The girl laughed uncertainly, a rather beautiful laugh in Harry's honest opinion, but she stopped when she noticed that he looked deadly

serious and a horrified expression came over her face, her lips parting in surprise.

“You wouldn’t really sacrifice people to a demon, right?” The girl asked slowly, shaking her head slowly in denial, while the little girl clinging to her legs shivered in fright, staring at Harry with big, blue eyes.

“I’ve done it before,” Harry said with a sly smile, enjoying the reactions of the girls in front of him as they both visibly flinched, staring at him with shock and horror, as if the very notion was unbelievable to them.

“Why?” The older girl demanded. “Why would you do that?”

“He deserved it,” Harry shrugged, not showing a lot of concern or interest in their righteous horror. “He wasn’t a nice person anyway.”

“Nobody deserves that,” The older girl snapped out angrily.

“Oh, I know a few people who do,” Harry said softly, intently, his eyes distant. “Human’s can be just as evil as the foulest demons.”

There was an uncomfortable silence as the older girl cocked her head, eyeing Harry strangely as if she had just seen something about him that she didn’t understand. Harry noticed the look but didn’t say anything as he settled back down into the bed, giving a half-hearted attempt at yanking the handcuffs and letting out a tired sigh. The silence was broken when the young girl poked her head out from her sister’s leg, her blue eyes wide and curious.

“Did you really rob McDonalds?” She asked innocently.

“Yep,” Harry answered honestly, a small smile coming over his face.

“Why?” The little girl asked again.

“Well, I was hungry and I needed the money,” Harry answered. “I also needed the idiots inside to stay inside so I could kill the other Denarian without getting interrupted and distracted.”

“What?” the older girl asked in puzzlement, incomprehension shining in her eyes as she stared at Harry.

Harry sighed in annoyance, rolling his eyes with irritation as he elaborated.

“Well, I couldn’t walk in and say “could you please stay inside while I go outside and kill a man who’s been taken over by an insane fallen angel that was banished to the Void millennia ago?”” He drawled out. “It’s a lot easier to point a gun at them and threaten to blow their heads off if they try to leave.”

“Oh,” The older girl uttered, blinking in surprise. She stood there uncomfortably, seemingly searching for a topic until she recalled something and she brightened up, a curious smile appearing on her face.

“So, do you go to a magic school?” asked the older girl, a little excitement in her voice as she continued. “I just got accepted at Salem’s this year. I knew that magic existed, because my older sisters one of those ‘true-wizards’, as she called herself. But I had no idea about wand-wizards or anything!”

“Meciel is a far greater teacher than any other human could be,” Harry scoffed, disdain in his voice at the thought of one of these schools.

“Meciel?” The younger one echoed.

“The Fallen,” answered the older girl, her voice barely a whisper as she suddenly realised what the innocent-looking wand-wizard in front of her had been no less than a day ago.

Harry nodded and a fond and affectionate smile came over his face. The older girl started at the first sign of true happiness on the boy in front of her, the emotion lighting up his face and casting away the darkness from his eyes, smoothing the hard edges of his mouth and suddenly showing how young he really was. But the expression didn’t

last and the darkness returned, a terrible anger and longing in his eyes that made her shiver and fumble for another topic.

“So, you know magic already?” she asked, honest curiosity and a hint of yearning in her voice.

Harry suddenly saw an opportunity and smiled, his eyes narrowing with speculation as he answered the girl.

“Oh, I know heaps of it,” He said softly, almost enticingly as he stared at the girl. “There’s so much you can do with it, and it’s not all evil, you know? It’s just...” He allowed himself to trail off as the older girl slightly leaned forward with badly hidden eagerness.

“Just what?” She asked. Her voice was little more than a whisper but Harry merely smiled and let out a sigh, changing the subject.

“Where is my wand and sword?” He asked.

The girl straightened, an expression of wariness appearing on her face as she regarded him with narrowed eyes, her voice suddenly hardening.

“Away from where you can’t get them,” She answered firmly. “They’re hidden in a place where you can’t go.”

“What about my necklace?” Harry asked, trying to be casual and probably failing at it badly. The girl sensed the note of longing and desperation in his voice and although there was a hint of sympathy in her eyes, her face smoothed over as she tried to keep a blank face.

“That’s the one with the coin, right?” She said softly.

Harry nodded quickly.

“It’s also hidden,” She answered.

Harry didn’t allow the smug smile that threatened to curve his lips as the girl strongly insinuated that the coin was still in the house. A wave

of relief spread through him, temporarily driving away the deep pool of dread and fear that seemed to rest at the pit of his stomach.

“What magic can you do?” The older girl asked in curiosity.

Harry smiled mysteriously and winked at her, before his face turned serious.

“Why am I here?” He asked quietly.

“Dad brought you home,” The girl answered, shrugging her shoulders as she was also unsure of the real reasons.

“He should have killed me. That’s what the Knights do to people like me,” Harry muttered, half in bitterness and half in puzzlement, as if he couldn’t comprehend the Knight’s actions.

“Mercy is a sign of the righteous,” said a cold, hard male voice from the door.

Harry looked up at the doorway as the two girls spun around, their eyes widening with surprise and a hint of guilt as a older teenage boy, maybe eighteen, with dark hair and grey eyes walked into the room with a stern expression on his face..

“Mum said not to come in here, Amanda, and you too, Hope!” He declared flatly, disapproval and disappointment ringing into his voice.

The older girl started, a guilty expression appearing on her face as she ducked her head.

“I just wanted to see him, Daniel,” she muttered softly.

“Hey, for an extra-five dollars, I can also do magic tricks,” Harry said loudly, painting a bright smile his face. “The good stuff, as well. Give me an extra ten and I’ll jump through a hoop of fire for you!”

Daniel shot Harry an annoyed expression, his face hard and unyielding as he regarded Harry evenly.

“Quiet, demon of the night,” He said coldly. “I don’t want to hear you speak.”

“Demon of the night?” Harry echoed, amusement flashing on his face as he stared at the boy incredulously. “You’ve been watching too much TV.”

Daniel ignored him as he stepped forward, quickly shepherding Amanda and Hope out of the room. As she left, Amanda threw one last curious glance at Harry, who gave her what he hoped was a friendly smile and a quick wave as she left the room. A moment later, the door closed with a loud click, leaving Harry alone in the small room. He sat back in his bed and rolled his eyes, annoyance on his face.

“Mercy is the sign of the righteous!” He mimicked, making an ugly face at the door. “Yeah, whatever you say, you moron.”

He sighed tiredly as he made himself comfortable but didn’t fall asleep. After all, the seeds had been planted and hopefully he would be out of the house in a matter of a few hours. He could rest later, when he found the coin and became one with Meciél again.

Harry waited for his opportunity for a few hours, barely able to hold himself still as the anticipation gnawed at him. He had laid down the bait, with quite a bit of subtlety, or so he liked to think, and the girl, Amanda, had taken a bite. Really, Meciél would have been very pleased with him at the moment. Still, a lot of his plan depended on plain luck and the right circumstances and he waited nervously for the right time.

Sure enough, just after the sun had started setting and during the sounds of laughter and clinking dishes downstairs, the floor outside his room creaked and the door clicked open, swinging in as Amanda walked in, her eyes darting behind her as she shut the door again softly and turned to face him. Her wand was once again trained on him and she sported a very nervous expression on her face, absently biting her lip as she regarded him carefully.

Harry watched her silently, keeping his mouth closed and pasting an inquisitive expression on his face, silently asking her what she was doing here while forcing down the surge of elation that shot through him. Finally, Amanda spoke up, her voice quiet with apprehension as she licked her lips uncertainly.

"You said you knew magic, wand-magic," She stated quickly. "The good stuff, you said."

"I do," Harry answered, giving a short nod.

Amanda waited for a few moments, clearly expecting him to say something more. When he didn't, she let out a sigh of exasperation.

"Well, go on," She said impatiently, her grey eyes watching him carefully. "Tell me a spell. Not black magic, though. A nice one."

Harry eyed her and forced himself to roll his eyes in annoyance, but he nodded, a disgruntled and bored expression on his face, as if he had nothing else to do anyway.

"Okay," He agreed and almost smiled at the flicker of triumph in Amanda's eyes. "First, hold your wand out in front of you....No, lower your elbow and straighten your wrist, yes that's right. Now, a short flick, yeah, like that. Okay, repeat the incantation after me. 'Alohomora!'"

"What does it do?" Amanda asked, suspicion suddenly appearing in her voice although her stance never changed as she absently practised the small, short flicks Harry had just told her to do.

"It conjures a bouquet of the reddest roses you will ever see," Harry lied smoothly. "They'll never die and wither and they make good gifts."

"Cool!" Amanda exclaimed with a smile.

"I know," was all Harry said. "Now, what was that incantation again?"

"Alohomora," Amanda said softly but clearly.

“Okay, try the spell,” Harry said, trying to act casual as his heart started beating quickly in his chest.

Amanda moved to do the spell but hesitated, her grey eyes finally showing a degree of wariness as she regarded him suspiciously.

“What if this is a trap?” She asked distrustfully. “I mean, you are a Denarian and all that.”

Harry let out an impatient sigh, but restrained himself quickly and rolled his eyes.

“Then point the wand at me,” He drawled out, as if he didn’t care. “If it’s a trap, I’ll be the one who gets hurt, not you.”

Amanda bit her lip but does as he says, levelling her wand at him. She gave it a short flick as incanted the spell, her voice clear and loud.

“Alohomora!”

Harry forced himself not to groan out loud as nothing happened, his muscles tense and ready as adrenaline surged through his body.

“Make your flick a little more forceful,” He suggested, forcing himself to sound casual.

“Alohomora!” Amanda stated again, given her flick a little more power. The spell worked as there was a small, blue flash and suddenly the cuffs on Harry’s wrist opened up with a small click.

Amanda looked shocked, her eyes widening and her mouth opening as she prepared to scream for help, but Harry moved as quickly as he could, throwing the covers off him and jumping out of the bed. He surged forward, lunging towards Amanda, who took a startled step backwards as he snatched the wand from her grasp and levelled it at her throat.

“Now, be very, very quiet,” He said softly and dangerously.

Amanda nodded slowly, fear etched onto her face as Harry's eyes seemed to gleam in the darkness, his gaze deadly and cold.

"Is the coin in the house?" He asked softly. "And you had better tell me the truth."

Amanda hesitated, her grey eyes frantically darting away from Harry's green orbs as she shifted on her feet, unwilling to betray her family and her father. Harry let out a small sigh and pressed the tip of the wand into her throat, making her whimper in fear.

"Look, give me the coin, my wand and sword and I'll leave," He said sincerely. "I won't hurt your family and I won't hurt you. I swear on my, as your mother said, eternally damned soul, that I'll just go and leave you all alone."

Amanda hesitated, indecision and fear marked on her face as she eyed him, seeing if his sincerity was true, and then nodded slowly, as if she believed him.

"It's here, isn't it?" Harry pressed again.

"Yes," Amanda whispered softly

"Take me to it," Harry ordered curtly and gestured for the door. "Now."

With a wand pressed to Amanda's throat, Harry gripped her arm with his other hand and led her from the small room. He paused in front of the door and motioned for the girl in front of him to go first, a look of warning in his eyes and he jabbed the wand at her. Amanda gulped, fear on her face as she slowly walked out of the room, turning her head and glancing down both ends of the hallway. She turned back to Harry and shook her silently at his unasked question. Harry moved forward and walked from the room into a long passage. At one end of the passage was a door, most likely the master bedroom, and at the other end was a set of stairs.

"Where did they take the coin?" Harry asked Amanda in a soft but hard voice, placing the tip of the wand at the back of her head. The girl quivered beneath his touch, a soft gasp of fright escaping her lips as she quickly gestured down the hallway towards the master bedroom.

"There's a safe room down there," She whispered quickly. "Dad built it so if we're ever attacked, we have somewhere to hide. I'm not mean to know this, but it's also where they put anything that they think is dangerous to us."

"Take me to the safe room," Harry instructed quietly and Amanda nodded as she led him down the hallway. The floorboards beneath them creaked softly and Harry winced, but the sounds of chattering and clinking dishes continued as the family continued eating their dinner downstairs, oblivious to the breakout that was happening in their very house. Amanda stopped in front of a linen closet and Harry frowned as she opened it, clicking on the light. Stacks of towels and sheets had been folded neatly and placed on the shelves and Harry blinked, turning to Amanda.

"There's a panel in there, right at the back where the wall meets the corner," She answered quietly, eyeing the wand carefully. "Is that all?"

Harry shook his head and gestured for the girl to get inside the closet. The blonde-haired pre-teen did as she was told and Harry followed her in, closing the door behind him. Inside, it was cramped as

Amanda pressed up against the shelves, trying to stay as far away from Harry as he possibly could. Harry ignored her and stared intently at the back wall, his heart thudding in his chest. He could see the place Amanda meant, a small section of the wall that looked as if it were misaligned with the corner of the closet. Slowly, he reached out with his fingers and let them brush over that section of the wall. He let out a small gasp of surprise, drawing Amanda's attention to him as he could suddenly feel a quiet hum of constant power around the panel. He pulled his hand back and frowned at it, biting his lip in thought.

"What is it?" The girl asked, unable to stop her own curiosity.

"There's a form of magic protecting that panel," Harry told her quietly. "It feels like the power your father was using when he and the other Knight fought me. I probably shouldn't touch it."

Amanda understood his implied message and bent down, eyeing the panel warily, as if she hadn't known that the thing was magical before. Harry watched with bated breath as she stuck her fingers in the small groove and fiddled around with something. There was a small click as something unlatched and suddenly the entire wall behind the closet shuddered as Amanda pushed it aside like a sliding door. Behind it, Harry could dimly see into a small, bare room surrounded by unlit candles. At the back end of the room, he could see a bunch of items, including the hilt of a sword wrapped around a bundle of cloth- the clothes he had been wearing that night. Anticipation and hope flared in his veins as he gestured for Amanda to go and pick the bundle up.

"Remember my promise," Harry said quietly as the blonde-girl moved past him. She hesitated, eyeing him carefully but nodded as she walked into the room and picked up the bundle, clutching it to her chest as she turned around. Harry gestured for her to come to him impatiently and backed out of the closet, opening the door and scanning the hallway carefully as he continued to level his wand at the girl in front of him.

The two of them backed out of the closet and Harry closed the door, taking a hand and gripping Amanda's shoulder firmly as he led her back to his room, closing the door firmly behind him. With quick,

frantic movements, Harry gestured for Amanda to drop the bundle onto the bed and then motioned her backwards as he approached it, his wand shaking in his hand as he pulled off the bloody and ripped clothes surrounding the bundle.

“Where is it?” Harry muttered to himself, frustration peaking in his voice as he carelessly threw the sheathed sword off the bed, rummaging in the small pile of items, which included his wand, his gun, a fistful of bullets, a wad of money, a small pen-knife, a small torch, a set of shiny keys and an unknown polished wooden box that Harry had never seen before.

“You don’t have to pick it up,” Amanda said hesitantly as she watched him pick up the box, staring at it intently as he tried and failed to open it. Harry snapped his head up, his emerald eyes looking as if they were close to tearing up in frustration. “You could be normal again.”

“I don’t want to be normal,” Harry snapped softly but harshly. “I want Meciél.”

“What about your family?” Amanda asked strongly.

“I don’t have any,” Harry muttered as he strained with all of his strength to pull the small lid off the box.

“I’m sorry,” Amanda said softly, sounding genuinely sympathetic.

“Don’t be,” Harry grunted as he placed the box down and levelled Amanda’s wand at it. “I’m the one who killed them, well, my Aunt and Uncle at least.”

Amanda looked shocked as Harry gave a short flick of the wand, feeling a trickle of his magic flow into him and burst out through the wand with a small flash of blue light. The lid of the box suddenly popped open with a soft click and Harry peered inside intently, tremendous relief flowing over his features. Inside the box laid the coiled chain of his necklace and on the end of that necklace sat Meciél’s coin, gleaming and unmoving. He let a smile of relief and

happiness come over his face as he glanced back up at Amanda and noticed her shocked expression from his previous statement.

“They were a little abusive to me,” Harry elaborated, and a chilling smile coming over his face. “Killing them was my first act as a Denarian and when I look back now, I don’t regret it.”

“Oh,” was all Amanda uttered as Harry turned back to the box and stretched out his trembling fingers, a look of longing on his face as he slowly clasped his fingers around the coin. The sigil that had been burnt into his left hand suddenly flared up with heat and Harry closed his eyes in pleasure as a wave of searing power swept through him, a cascading tumble of fire and heat that burned the bottom of his stomach with delight. His skin tingled as a warm, sweeping presence, decidedly feminine, cantered in his mind and suddenly Meciél appeared in all her beautiful, her silver eyes bright with delight as she regarded Harry with an elated smile.

“You are not dead then,” She breathed, her voice flowing with relief. “I had feared for the worse when I was taken from you, beloved.”

“No, they didn’t kill me,” Harry remarked, his face transforming into the picture of innocence as a blinding smile came over his face. “Actually, they saved my life and healed me up.”

“I believe you are very lucky, beloved,” Meciél said seriously and walked over to him, her warm hand stroking through his hair alike to a soothing maternal gesture. “And I am tremendously relieved that you are still alive.

“I agree,” Harry muttered with all seriousness, unconsciously leaning into Meciél’s touch as a small smile of affection came over his face. He could feel Meciél rummaging through his mind, quickly scanning the memories of the previous day faster than he could comprehend them, but he didn’t mind as her familiar and welcome glow spread through his body.

Meanwhile, Amanda had frowned, staring first at the wall that Harry seemed to be talking to and then at Harry himself as she saw him lean into the air as if somebody were there.

“Who are you talking to?” She asked, breaking into Harry’s moment. “Because there’s nobody here except for you and me.”

Harry sighed and shot her a dark look; leaning back from Meciél’s illusionary touched as the Meciél’s spectre disappeared from his vision. However, the comforting stroking of his hair continued as he stood up, his face showing so much annoyance and irritation that the blonde girl visible flinched and took a step backwards away from him.

“Just because you can’t see her doesn’t mean that she wasn’t here,” Harry snapped out. “The only way you could see her was if you took up the coin.”

“Oh,” Amanda uttered softly as Harry let a sly smile come over his face and held out the necklace that was clasped in his hands

“Would you like to pick it up?” He asked derisively.

Amanda slowly shook her head, leaning away from the coin, but Harry took it back and carefully placed it around his neck, fingering the coin almost lovingly before he turned back to Amanda.

“Now, who’s here in the house,” He asked. Amanda hesitated but after seeing Harry roll his eyes, she spoke up, her quiet voice echoing in the room as she quickly rattled off a list of names.

“Well, Hope, Daniel and Mom are here. Alicia and Matthew are out at a movie with some friends or whatever,” She rattled off nervously, her eyes darting to Harry as she continued. “Harry’s in bed, it’s his nap time. Dad and Sanya have been gone for the day; they’re on some work thing, and Molly’s out in her new apprenticeship. She’s a wizard as well, not a wand-wizard like us though.”

Harry stared at her incredulously, his eyes wide with surprise and Amanda squirmed under his gaze, fidgeting on her feet/

“Are they your brother and sisters?” He asked in disbelief.

“Well, Mom, Dad and Sanya aren’t...” Amanda trailed off as Harry let out a small chuckle of mirth, shaking his head with an incredulous sigh as he turned back to the bundle, still keeping his wand levelled at the girl as he picked up the bundle of clothes and wrinkled his nose at the smell.

“So, I guess it’s true what they say about catholic parents and contraceptives,” He muttered to himself, but it was loud enough for Amanda to hear as a look of disgust came over her face as she wrinkled her nose in revulsion.

“Ew!” Amanda cried out loudly, but Harry ignored her as he unfolded his clothes and quickly ran his wand over it, a soft incantation slipping from his lips. Amanda peeked forward and her eyes widened as the clothes unwrinkled themselves, the blood stain fading away and the rip closing in on itself under the useful household charm. “Cool.” She muttered.

Harry turned to her and cleared his throat, making a motion with the wand. Amanda blinked in confusion but her cheeks suddenly stained with red and she let out an “eep” as Harry took off his pyjama shirt, spinning around quickly as the boy changed his clothes, embarrassment painted all over her features.

Harry finished dressing himself and reached for the sword-sheath, frowning at its weight as he strapped it to his back. Although it was a powerful artefact, it was pretty much useless to him until he grew a little taller, its size making it clumsy to wield at the moment.

“You can turn around now,” Harry said, his voice tinged with slight amusement and Amanda turned around, her cheeks still blushing.

She watched him as he reached for his own wand, which was a little bigger than her own and seemed to have runes carved into the very wood of it. Harry quickly traded wands, making sure one was aimed at Amanda at all times, and then placed her wand in his pocket.

Amanda watched him do this with narrowed eyes, eying his pocket closely, but she suddenly gave a start as Harry picked up the gleaming revolver and checked the ammo. He reached into one of his other pockets and pulled out several bullets, slotting in the ammunition and reloading the gun and with quick, well-practised movements.

“What are you going to do now?”

Harry blinked as he tucked the gun into his pants and shoved the rest of his cluttered stuff into his pockets, eyeing the blonde girl in front of him, who looked as if she regretted saying anything.

“Well, like I promised, I’m leaving,” Harry answered and watched her sag in relief, as if she had been having doubts that he would have kept his word. “But I’m not sure how I’m going to leave. I wish I knew how to apparate or make portkeys. Hmm, maybe if I open a portal to the Nevernever...”

‘No, beloved, that will not be possible. There are powerful bindings on this house and although they are not made of traditional magic, they are powerful nonetheless. You will not be able to open a portal here. I suspect, beloved, that a great number of my powers will be restricted in this place.’

“What’s apparate and portkey?” Amanda asked curiously, knocking Harry out of his daze as he was considering Meciél’s words.

“It’s a wand-wizard way of travelling,” Harry answered her, his voice distracted as he frowned in thought. “It’s...um...instant teleportation from one place to another.”

“Cool!” Amanda exclaimed, looking impressed. She suddenly got a puzzled look on her face and glanced at him curiously. “Why can’t you do them?”

“I’m not old enough,” Harry declared flatly. “Making a portkey is pretty technical stuff and I haven’t learnt about it yet and I’d probably leave behind an arm or a leg if I try to apparate.”

Amanda let out a small giggle but it faded away as she saw that he seemed to be deadly seriously.

“That can really happen?” She asked in surprise.

Harry nodded absently, eying the window as he wondered if he could squeeze out of it. He saw a car drive past the house, its headlights bright in the darkening night and suddenly a speculative smile came over his face as he turned back to Amanda

“Come with me, we’re going downstairs.”

The first person to see Harry and Amanda walking into the living room was the little girl that had entered his room before, Hope, and she let out a loud, piercing scream, backing away from him. The table in front of her seemed to be in the middle of being cleaned, with empty and food-smeared plates and half-empty glasses. Harry dragged Amanda in front of him as he placed his wand at her temple, his eyes serious as footsteps pounded from the next room and Charity burst into the living room, an apron over her clothes.

Her eyes quickly flickered over towards Harry and Amanda and fear for her daughter spread over her face as she gestured at Hope, her voice firm and hard.

“Hope, come here!” Charity ordered quickly and small girl moved away from Harry, her mother ushering her out of the room.

“What’s going on?” Somebody called from the kitchen and the tall boy that Harry had met before, the one Amanda had called Daniel, entered the room, an inquisitive look on his face. His eyes scanned the room, widening at the sight of Harry. His face hardened until he took notice of Amanda and a flicker of panic flashed on his face.

“Hi,” Harry said brightly, flashing a fake smile as he clenched both his wand and Amanda with a tight grip. “Where’s the door?”

“Let her go,” Charity said quietly, her voice hard and her face calm, but Harry could see an underlying layer of fear for her daughter, a slight trembling of the shoulders.

“You see, if I let her go then I won’t have a hostage,” Harry said and shook his head, tightening his arm around Amanda’s throat but still leaving her room to breathe.

“Take me instead,” Charity said quickly, her dark eyes serious. “I promise to go quietly and give you no trouble. Just let her go.”

“Hell no,” Harry snorted, shaking his head quickly. “You’re bigger and stronger than Amanda and you’re more likely to give me trouble. Besides, you’re a lot scarier as well, you devil woman.”

Charity blinked, taken aback, but Amanda, held in place by Harry’s arm, seemed to let out a little giggle, as if she found something about the situation extremely amusing. Both Charity and Daniel glanced at her, startled, while Harry looked down into her tangled blonde hair, a frown on his face.

“What is so funny?” He demanded.

“You said ‘devil woman’,” Amanda replied hesitantly, the humour gone from her voice as if she could feel Harry’s frown on the back of her head.

“And...?” Harry asked slowly, not understanding what the blonde girl was talking about.

“Well, you’re a demon,” Amanda said. “And you’re calling my mum a devil woman. I just found it...funny.”

Harry let out a sigh and dug the wand into Amanda’s head with a little bit more force, eliciting a small gasp of shock from Amanda and hisses of disapproval from both Charity and Daniel, who eyed the wand as if it were the most dangerous weapon they had ever seen.

“I have a wand to your head. Could you at least be a little scared, hmm?” said Harry flatly, before he let out another sigh, this one of impatience. “Look, from now on, you don’t get to talk.”

“What...” Amanda started, but Harry interrupted him, his voice hard.

“Ah! I said no talking.”

“If you hurt her, I will murder you,” Charity said in a cold whisper when Harry looked back up, and he stared into her eyes, seeing the cold resolve behind them and knowing that the woman was deadly serious with her threat.

“Okay, I’m definitely not using you know,” He muttered and his green eyes swung to the tall, teenage boy. “Hey, you there. Get the keys to your car.”

Daniel bit his lip uncertainly and glanced at Charity, who nodded at him without taking her eyes off her daughter, and then left the room. Harry could hear him quickly stomping his way upstairs as a tense silence fell through the living room. Charity continued to stare intently at her daughter, as if there was nothing else that mattered to her at that moment. Harry noticed the looks and gave a small, bitter smile.

“It’s hard seeing your loved ones in danger, isn’t it?” He asked softly, eyeing Charity coldly.

The woman finally looked away from her daughter and met Harry’s gaze unflinchingly, an unspoken answer to his question on her cold and angry face. Harry smiled again and was the first to look away, focussing on the warmth of the coin that weighed around his neck.

Well, now you know how I felt when you took Meciél from me,” He said harshly. “Consider this my revenge.”

“You love her?” Amanda broke in, surprise in her voice.

Harry frowned, almost ready to tell her off for speaking again, but decided to answer the question.

“She’s the only one who’s ever shown affection to me,” He answered quietly, his voice losing some of its harshness. “She’s the only who’s ever cared for me. Of course I love her.”

“She doesn’t love you,” Charity said and there was a slight look of sympathy on her face as her voice softened. “She’s a Fallen, a manipulator and a deceiver. She’s using you.”

Harry let out a derisive snort, staring at Charity and rolling his eyes.

“Of course she’s using me,” He snapped, dimly aware of Meciél giving them mental approximation of a jolt of surprise in his mind.

Charity blinked, confusion twisting her face and furrowing her brows at Harry’s declaration as Harry continued, his face deadly serious.

“She knows that I’ve always wanted a family that would love me and she uses that,” Harry said softly. “I know that. But that doesn’t mean that I still don’t love her.”

“She’ll devour you,” Charity whispered intently. “She’ll twist you and eventually she’ll be in control, not you.”

Harry gave a snort, dismissing Charity’s concerns with surprising ease.

“If she wanted that then she would have done it already,” He said, scorn in his voice. “She would have possessed me when I was younger and weaker.”

It was at this moment that Daniel came back into the room, a set of jingling car keys clasped in his hand. Harry gave a soft sigh of relief and felt Meciél steady his nerves, her warmth flowing through him and comforting him more than she had realised. He took a deep breath and then turned back to Daniel.

“Alright, this is what’s going to happen,” He said quickly but firmly. “Daniel, you’re taking me to the car and then you’re going to drive us

away from this place. Amanda, you're going to come with me to make sure Daniel does what I say. Charity, you're not going move at all. If you do what I say, I won't hurt any of you. I just want to get out of here."

Charity ground her teeth, fury flashing in her dark eyes, but she backed away and gave her son a tight nod, emotions flashing through her eyes as Daniel swallowed nervously and gestured at one of the doors on the other side of the living room. He walked over and opened it up, revealing the cool night sky on the other side. Harry, still keeping his eyes on Charity and Daniel, led Amanda towards the door. Charity watched his progress with burning eyes and Harry knew that at that particular moment, she would have liked nothing more than to see him dead. But she made no attempt to move, her gaze flicking to her daughter, and Harry made it outside, closing the door with a soft thump.

The moment he stepped outside, he felt something. Tight strands of power lay over the front yard, a deep humming noise barely detectable to his ears even with Meciél's abilities. A lot of power had been put into the bindings on the house, more than the secret panel in the cupboard, but the wards didn't react to his presence. Perhaps it was because he had been invited in by the family or perhaps the wards didn't perceive him a threat to the family because of his promise. Whatever the reason, Harry kept walking down the yard and approached the cars.

Two cars had been parked down the driveway, a small, blue minivan and a battered and old car. Daniel gestured to the battered car and Harry nodded, still clutching Amanda against himself as he led her over to the car. Suddenly he frowned as a thought occurred to him and moved the wand away from her head, levelling it at the blue minivan. A quick, sharp incantation burst from his lips as he gave the wand a quick slash.

There was a flash of silver light- the tip of Harry's wand glinting in an odd, metallic glow and suddenly one of the minivan's tires let out a loud hiss of noise as a large gouge ripped through the rubber, effectively slashing the tire and making it useless. Harry nodded to himself in satisfaction and opened the backdoor to the battered car.

He pushed Amanda's head down, forcing her into the backseat and sitting next to her as Daniel hopped in the driver's seat.

"Where am I taking you?" The teenager asked quietly, his eyes flicking to the mirror and eyeing Amanda, who had scooted over to the other side of the seat, with a look of fierce determination.

"I want you to take me to the nearest highway," Harry said and glanced out the window, seeing Charity's face peeking through the curtains. "Right now."

Daniel nodded and started the car, which belted out a deep, throbbing noise. Harry continued eyeing the window, although his wand remained levelled at Amanda, seeing Charity disappear from view.

Moments later, Daniel had reversed out of the driveway and was speeding along the road. Harry finally allowed himself to relax a little and sat back in his chair, triumph roaring through him. He had made it. He was free again. He let a small, relieved smile come over his face and let out a soft chuckle, taking a deep breath and glancing around. Daniel's face was intent as he stared at the dark roads ahead, carefully navigating through the suburban streets, but Amanda was watching him with something like sadness and pity on her face, eying him with a strange look in her eyes. Harry met her gaze and raised his eyebrows, his wand still levelled at her.

"What?" He asked in annoyance.

"It's, I dunno, sad about you and your Fallen," Amanda said, squirming uncomfortably under his gaze. "You know, that it's the only person to show you kindness."

"I don't want your pity," Harry growled in irritation but sighed and rolled his eyes, looking back out of the window. "Anyway, I thought I told you to stop talking."

Some time later, Harry glanced out of the window and frowned, seeing nothing but darkness accompanied by the dim light of the stars, which were partially blotted by thick, angry clouds.

"Hey, stop here," He called out to Daniel, who nodded and slowed down, pulling over to the side of the dark road. As the car stopped, Harry saw a few cars drive past, their lights whizzing by.

"So, what are you going to do now?" Daniel asked as he switched the ignition off.

"I'm leaving," Harry said as he unbuckled himself.

"What about us?" Amanda asked softly, eyeing him with a pleading look in her grey eyes. "You promised."

Harry didn't say anything but he raised his wand, levelling it at Daniel, who flinched, staring at Harry with wide eyes. His lips opened as he began to say something, but Harry interrupted him.

"Stupefy!"

Daniel slumped as a beam of shimmering red light struck him, his head flopping down and slamming into steering wheel, his eyes closed, while Harry turned to Amanda. The blonde girl had a horrified expression on her face, tears welling in her grey eyes as she tentatively poked his shoulder with her finger.

"Relax," Harry said quickly. "He's just stunned."

"You're not going to kill us?" Amanda asked, her face hopeful.

Harry snorted, a bitter sound as he spoke.

"Your father saved my life, even if he did wound me," He told her. "The Old Rules state that I owe him a large debt. Killing his daughter and son wouldn't be such a good thing to do, would it?"

Amanda blinked as relief swept over her face, while Harry reached into his pocket and pulled out her wand. He threw it at her and she caught it, blinking in shock as Harry opened the door and stepped outside. She slowly crawled over the backseat and peered out the

window, straining to see him, but it was like he had just disappeared into the darkness. With a sigh, she sat back and waited for help to arrive.

Harry entered his apartment as the first rays of the sun peeked from the east, golden rays beaming down on the large city of Chicago. As soon as he entered, he slammed the door shut and touched a small, elegantly rune that had been carved into the doorframe. The rune glowed with a deep red light, lighting up as if it were an ember as the protections around the apartment activated. Although they weren't especially powerful and could have been ripped down easily, they ensured that nobody could track him back here.

Harry finally let out a sigh of relief as exhaustion washed over his features, the emotion and physical strain of the previous night finally slamming into him with the subtlety of a bulldozer. He staggered to his bedroom and threw his sword in the corner of his room as he flopped onto the bed, closing his eyes and exhaling loudly.

"I almost lost you," He said softly and within his mind, he heard Meciél respond, her voice soft and comforting.

"It was a close call, beloved, but I am still here."

"I almost lost you," Harry repeated tiredly.

'But you didn't, beloved, so you may rest easy.'

Harry sighed and fumbled beneath his dark shirt, clasping the necklace and the coin with his hand. He could feel the steady throb of heat emanating from the coin and allowed it to wash over him, relaxing his tense muscles and soothing his agitated mind.

"I gotta find a better place for this coin," He murmured softly.

'I suggest you place it somewhere within your body, beloved. That is what most of the others do.'

Harry nodded, gripping the coin tighter, but suddenly had the sense that somebody was nearby and opened his eyes. In front of him,

Meciel's illusion appeared, her face softened and pensieve as she sat down next to him, her hair glimmering as the sun beamed in through the window. She placed an arm around him and Harry let out a small noise of approval, sounding very much like a child as he leaned into her shoulder, savouring her warmth and gentle smell.

"You truly meant what you said," Meciel said gently, her voice quiet and pensieve. "That I show you affection so I can use you."

"You do, don't you?" Harry asked softly. Before Meciel could answer, he opened his eyes, his emerald orbs stirring with something like sadness and resignation "Don't lie to me Meciel. I know you do it's okay, I'm not upset."

"Why not, beloved?" Meciel asked quietly.

"Because you might not love me like I love you, but I know you at least care for me," Harry said, his voice thick with drowsiness. "You could have crushed my will and taken over this body ages ago. You could have forced me to give the coin to somebody else, somebody that had more power than I do. But you didn't, and you've cared for me more than anybody else in my life has. That's gotta mean something."

Meciel stared at Harry for a second and something flashed over her face, a brief look of sadness and pain, and she wrapped her arm around Harry, drawing him in closer to her body as she manipulated his body into lying down. Together, they lay in comfortable silence as Harry embraced the warm presence of Meciel, a tingle running up his skin as sleep started to claim him. At that moment, both Fallen Angel and damned mortal were happy to just sit there in each others company.

## Three Years Later

Lightning flashed and the clouds rumbled ominously as a thick, heavy shower of rain poured to the ground. The tree branches whipped violently through the air as a loud, shrieking wind blasted through the cold and wet city of Chicago. Rivers of rain flowed over the asphalt ground, running down into the curb and towards the nearest storm drain while the sunlight dimmed as it went behind a particular thick and angry set of clouds. This weather was enough to keep even the most zealous worker huddled under a warm blanket at home but on the roof of a multi-levelled parking lot, a fourteen-year-old boy walked briskly through the rain, seemingly unconcerned as he was drenched from head to toe. A dark overcoat covered his body, thick leather deflecting most of the water, while underneath he wore simple but effective dark clothes. Green eyes peered out of his water-soaked bangs, glinting with hatred and rage that most humans were incapable of feeling, but it seemed to be carefully constrained as the boy walked forward.

“Where are you, demon?” called out Harry, his voice light but decidedly dangerous as he tightened his grip around the hilt of his sword. The blade was made of gleaming steel etched with magical runes specifically designed for the evocation of True Magic, and it hissed and spluttered as raindrops fell on it and turned into steam, a faint but heated aura of scarlet fire warping around the blade.

‘Be very careful, beloved. It may be trying to lure you in.’

“I’m not going to let it get away,” Harry said grimly, his voice echoing in the large and deserted roof of the multi-level car park. Meciél’s dark powers, a cascading wave of roaring and blazing power, flowed through him, searing into his veins, bringing about the darker feelings of pleasure, battle-lust and fury, but Harry easily kept them under control, allowing his mind to remain focussed and calm as he peered through the falling sleets of rain. “Otherwise it’ll just come after me again.”

‘I am not suggesting that you allow it to flee but...Beloved, look out!’

But Harry had seen the demon from the corner of his eye and he swung his head around, his eyes blazing with demonic powers as he took a good look at the unnatural construct in front of him. The demon, like all summoned demons, probably didn't look like this back in its true home in the Nevernever. The physical body in this world was just a construct made up of magic to temporarily store the demon's consciousness and allow it access to the mortal world, the human world. Harry understood that the demons needed to use part of their life energy and magic to make the transfer across and the bigger and more complicated the body, the more life energy and magic you needed, which was why the more human a demon looked, the more powerful it really was. What he couldn't understand was their complete inability to create a body that seemed even remotely appealing.

This demon was shaped in a vague humanoid form – Harry said vague because with the short, stubby and slimy tentacles coating the body, he really couldn't be sure, and had two arms, two legs and a short, stubby and very slimy tail. But its face looked like a cross between a gorilla and a cockroach and its body looked as if it had been beaten in by a gang of teenagers wielding baseball bats. Still, its eyes burned with a glowing cherry-red light, malevolence and hatred seeping through as it glared at Harry. Sharp, jagged teeth sprouted from its mouth, dripping odorous green saliva onto the ground. Its twisted and hulky body rippled and churned as it lunged towards the teenage Denarian, but the boy merely took a step backwards and twirled on his feet, his overcoat flapping in the wind as he disappeared with a loud crack.

Harry apparated further down the roof and raised his sword, gripping it in his hand as he levelled the tip of the blade at the demon in front of him. He concentrated, bringing forward the torrent of dark, blazing power and channelling it into the sword, giving it focus and control. The magical runes on the sword glowed in an eerie crimson light, looking like bright embers, and Harry chanted the incantation, his voice harsh and cold.

The runes along the blade of gleaming steel all flared at once, a bright flash of blue and white, and the sword trembled in Harry's hands as a flash of lightning zapped from the tip of the blade,

shooting through the air and striking the demon in the chest with a loud booming noise, which was barely heard over the other sounds of the storm. The demon staggered, a loud and eerie screech of pain rumbling in its throat as dark, oozing blood dripped from its chest, and charged for him, its footsteps leaving behind a trail of gooey slime on the ground.

“Firerajo!” Harry shouted out and the runes on the sword flashed again, this time in a mixture of dark crimson and bright yellow as Harry slashed his sword through the air, the blade making a threatening hissing noise as it swished through the air. From the blade came a streak of bright red-gold flames and an unnatural smell of sulphur as hellfire lanced through the air, digging into the demon's side. The demon let out another screech but it didn't slow down as more blood pooled from its wounds and Harry gave a short curse and whirled around, disappearing away yet again.

He reappeared and refocused his power into the sword, true-magic fuelled by the powerful and violent energy of hellfire flowing into the blade of steel. The runes throbbed with an intense dark light, which flickered around the sword as power built up within it. The demon let out a screech, hatred and rage flowing through its voice and no matter how tough the thing seemed to be, it was severely lacking in brains as it spun around and prepared to charge again. Harry waited, the power flowing through him like a wave of hot lava, searing heat bringing out the intoxication that only dark power could bring. His rage burned in his mind but Harry used it to continue powering his spell, the calculative and cold part of his mind in control as he brought his sword up.

“Flararanga!” He incanted loudly, his voice ringing with true-magic, and pushed his sword forward, gritting his teeth as a rush of power suddenly left his senses. There was a flash made up of pure dark radiance, a completely black spell that seemed to suck up any nearby light, accompanied by a wave of rushing heat. The flare of darkness struck the demon – there was another screech of pain and the sound of a small, thundering roar- and the smell of sulphur reeked into the air. The demon was driven back by the flare, hurled through the air

and blasted into the ground several metres away, its limbs flailing as curls of oily, black smoke rose up from its severely-burned body.

Harry didn't waste a single second of his new advantage and reached into his overcoat as he twirled on his feet, his left hand clasping the sword as he right hand brought out a gleaming, polished wand. He disappeared only to reappear above the demon, his sword flicking through the air and slicing into demon hide before him. Unnatural flesh sizzled as the demon screamed and Harry used his momentum to level the wand at the fallen creature, his eyes serious. For a second, the searing flow of power in his veins was overtaken by a new magic, wand-magic, a cool, almost icy flow of magic that left tingles in his skin as he channelled it through his wand.

“Exturbo Arduro!”

A flash of flames jutted from the tip of his wand, a burning blast of heat that slammed into the demon with great force, slamming it back onto the ground with a screech of pain. More smoke curled from its body, an acrid smell of burnt flesh and something so revolting that Harry had no words for it filling the air, but the demon moved with a blur, despite his injuries and Harry grunted as one of the gangly arms slammed into him. He was thrown off his feet by the power of the blow and landed several metres away, sprawling out on the ground with a pained grunt. He climbed to his feet, pain flickering over his features, but his eyes widened and he quickly ducked as a stream of vile and smelly green liquid sprayed over his head— an acid of some kind considering that mere droplets were smoking the concrete floor in front of him.

He quickly apparated away and reappeared behind the demon, which was spraying the concrete with a flow of acid from its mouth as if it were a hose. It was still on the ground, trying to stagger up from the ground as it clutched at where Harry had cut into it, severing its muscles from its right leg. Harry's face showed no mercy as he brought his sword up and with all of his strength, slammed it across its neck in a powerful, sweeping blow. A dark flare of satisfaction lit up in his gut as the demon's head toppled off the body and landed on the ground with a messy splat, while the body itself collapsed down back on the ground and the demon's consciousness was forcefully

banished from this physical construct, wounded and hurt as it retreated back into the Nevernever.

Harry stood up again, his eyes scanning the area for any more attacks as both dark power and adrenaline rushed through him, each bringing with it its own unique high. After a few moments, when Harry hadn't detected anything, he let out a small sigh and sheathed his sword into the scabbard that lay within his overcoat and tucked his wand back into his pocket.

"Do you think we're pissing anybody off?" Harry asked out loud, frowning as he considered the demon's corpse below him that was even now melting away into clear translucent goo that would shortly break down and disappear. "Because it's not everyday that somebody tries to assassinate me using a demon."

'I believe so, beloved. It does require a considerable effort to both summon and constrain a demon for a specific task.'

"It wasn't that hard to kill though," Harry mused softly as he stepped away from the demon's corpse, which had mostly melted away by now. "It must have been a weak demon and a weak summoner."

'Or perhaps you are much more powerful than they realised.'

"There's that," Harry admitted and frowned in thought. But his contemplation didn't last long as the faint sounds of sirens could be heard in the distance and he sighed in annoyance, idly brushing his wet bangs out of his eyes as the rain continued to pour down around him. "I must have made a lot of noise."

'Only a little bit, beloved.'

Harry took one last look at his surroundings and then twirled on his feat, his overcoat flaring around him as he disappeared with a loud crack.

Harry frowned at his window as a flash of lightning briefly illuminated the room, a rumbling thunder accompanying it a second later, but turned around and walked back into the training room, a small tray in

his hands. Inside the summoning circle, the small faery Cessbulby, tapped her foot impatiently against the wooden floor, tossing her pinkish-red hair over her shoulder as she let out a huff of exasperation. Her blue eyes lit up with child-like delight and she let out a small squeal as Harry dropped the plate outside the circle, her wings fluttering with clouds of shining silver motes as she hovered up in the air, staring at the fresh fruit and cheese with a look of longing.

“Give it to me!” She said, licking her small lips, her fingers fluttering over the dome of impenetrable flickering red magic that separated her from the food. Harry shook his head with an amused smile at the small faery’s antics as he sat down.

“Promise that you won’t escape and that you’ll answer my questions,” Harry insisted carefully and moved the tray a little closer to the barrier. The faery made an odd whining noise and nodded her head. “We’re using the standard agreement, Cessbulby.”

“I promise, I promise and I promise,” She said impatiently. Harry nodded in satisfaction, knowing that a faery or Sidhe promising something three times was as close to an oath as you could get from the immortal ones, and he slid the tray into the circle. Since the tray was a physical object, the barrier shuddered and flickered and broke apart in a shower of sparkling light as Cessbulby darted forward, her form as blur as she dove into the tray of food.

Harry watched the small faery tear through the fruit and cheese with fury, her small arms a blur as she shoved far more in her mouth than Harry would have expected for a six-inch or so being to be able to fit in her stomach. It didn’t matter that he had watched this happen several times since he had first summoned the small faery, it was still disgusting.

“So,” He said, diverting his eyes away with a faint look of disgust on his face as Cessbulby ripped into her food. “What’s new?”

“Maeve held a celebration recently,” Cessbulby said, gulping down a relatively large chunk of cheese as she wiped her mouth with the

back of her hand, her wings beating languidly behind her. "It was fun. We played with stupid mortals all night. Maeve really had fun with one of them, who said he 'would have died to look like that'. Well, he did."

"Right," Harry said slowly, shaking his head in resignation at the antics of the Sidhe. "As much as I enjoy hearing about Maeve, I was sort of thinking about something closer to home."

"You enjoy hearing about Maeve?" Cessbulby asked, her voice pitching in excitement as she looked up from her eating, her small, white dress smeared with grape juice. "What a coincidence, because she enjoys hearing about you, and especially likes watching you fight. I mean, she got all interested when she heard about your little fight not too long ago."

Harry blinked in surprise as he stared at Cessbulby in shock and the small faery giggled. Her laugh made a beautiful, tinkling noise akin to wind chimes as the faery leaned forward, her voice lowering as if she was whispering a dirty secret to him.

"Ooh, yes, we all saw your little fight with that demon," Cessbulby said, giggling slightly as she eyed Harry with glowing, soulless eyes. "Maeve was very interested in it and quite happy when you won. The Lady seems to have her eyes on you for some reason. Hey, are you two going to play sport with each other?"

Harry made a choking noise as Meciél laughed prettily in his head, his eyes widening with shock. He could feel his cheeks burning with heat and stared at Cessbulby with a look of disbelief on his face. He knew very well what the faery idea of 'sporting' was and the mere thought of that with Maeve was enough to send an odd shudder through his body. His hand absently reached up to brush against his cheek, remembering the time when the extremely-enchanted Winter Lady had kissed him. But he broke out of his stupor and quickly shook his head at Cessbulby's question.

"Oh, pity," Cessbulby said, her voice sulky as a child's. "That would have been fun to watch. Maeve's sporting always is."

“Can we get back to the news?” Harry broke in, his voice at a snap as he felt his cheeks heating up again. Inside his mind, he could feel Meciél’s amusement and he let out a small growl of anger and irritation. “What is it, Meciél?”

‘It is of no importance, beloved. I was merely musing that boys can grow up so fast, especially when they have a crush on the Winter Lady of the High Sidhe.’

“I do not...” Harry began, his voice thick with annoyance and anger, but he sighed and closed his eyes, willing it all away. When he opened them again, his face was a lot calmer and his blush had died down as he swung his green, icy eyes back to Cessbulby, who was eating another grape with a light-hearted expression on her small face.

“You saw the fight, then? Who sent the demon after me?”

“Ah, ah, ah,” tutted Cessbulby, wagging a small, pale finger towards Harry’s direction in a slightly reproachful manner. “That question’s not part of the bargain. Maeve didn’t actually see the summoning. We just watched the fight.”

Harry frowned sourly but grunted in acknowledgement and moved to a different topic.

“Cessbulby, do you have any news about the Order of the Black Denarius? Have the gangs been fighting with each other again? Have they encountered the Knights of the Cross? Are any of them dead?” He asked.

“Now that you ask, I remember hearing that Nicodemus has really gotten beaten up lately,” Cessbulby said, nodding her head in thought as she shoved a handful of cheese into her mouth.

“Really?” Harry asked quickly, not feeling surprised when he felt a surge of elation from Meciél. Nicodemus and his Fallen were no friends with Meciél and it had been Nicodemus who had ordered his daughter, Deirdre, to kill the new host of Meciél and Harry several

years ago. Although Harry had survived the fight and kept his head down from then on, he knew that Nicodemus still occasionally searched for Meciél, still seeking to destroy her and her host.

“Yeah,” Cessbulby said, her gaze leaving Harry’s face as turned back to the plate, a cute frown on her face as she searched the last scraps of food. “There was a lot of fighting with him and Balthrail. He lost a lot of territory and assets.”

“Well, finally, some good news,” Harry muttered, a small smile of satisfaction growing on his face.

“Anyway, Nicodemus’ might have recovered, but the last of his powerbase was broken because of the Knights of the Cross,” Cessbulby continued, her voice glum as she sifted through the microscopic crumbs, too small even to pique her interest. “He’s was really mad, especially when his daughter was killed by the Knights, that Michael Carpenter guy.”

“Deirdre is dead?” Harry said, a full-blown grin appearing over his face and he let out a small chuckle of glee, his face lighting up and his eyes sparkling in happiness. “Oh, this day is getting a lot better. What’s Nicodemus doing now? Tell me he’s crying; please tell me he’s crying.”

“No, he’s not crying,” Cessbulby said, giggling a little at Harry’s crestfallen face as she gave an experimental bat of her wings. “The last we all saw was an oath to destroy the son’s and brutalise his daughters of the Knight, before killing the Knight himself. So, do you have anymore food?”

Harry, however, had started at Nicodemus’ oath and was frowning, absently gnawing on his lips as he shook his head distractedly.

“No, no food,” He muttered. “When did Nicodemus make this oath?”

The small faery shrugged her tiny shoulder, seemingly unconcerned.

“It was really recent,” She answered.

Harry's frown deepened. Recent to immortal creature could mean hours or days. He leaned back on the floor as Cessbulby glanced around one last time for any food and disappeared in a showery sparkle of silver motes, returning back to her home in the Nevernever. Charity and her family were in danger. Sure, he didn't like them, hell, they had kidnapped and imprisoned him, but they have saved his life. He frowned, indecision marring his features as he sat there. Technically, Harry owed them a debt for saving his life. Sure, it had been the Knights that had stabbed him but it had been Charity who had looked after him, even if he hadn't wanted it at the time.

"The knight was the one who injured me in the first place," Harry muttered as he stood up, giving a short sharp flick with his wand. The dirty and food-smeared tray shot from the floor and sailed through the air, landing on the bench with a loud clutter.

'But the family saved your life.' Meciell said severely, and Harry could tell she was taken this very seriously. 'We owe them a great debt.'

"You want me to go and do something stupid, don't you?" Harry asked with a weary sigh. Still, the face of a small girl staring at him with pity flashed through his face and he hesitated, his face marred with indecision and uncertainty, before he let out a resigned sigh as he made his decision and walked into his bedroom, strapping his sword on his back as he continued. "This is about your little rules of honour and debt, the Old World stuff."

'Many of the hostilities between Nicodemus and I started because I followed the Old Rules and he did not.' Meciell said. 'Besides, if you weren't going to do something, then why are you readying yourself for combat?'

Harry rolled his eyes as he strapped the dulled and aged revolver in a leather holster beneath his overcoat and gripped his wand to his hand.

"Because I knew that you were going to make me do this," He muttered. "Whether I wanted to go or not. Besides, I haven't fallen

that low yet and it does gets rid of the debt and piss off Nicodemus at the same time. What more could I ask for?"

Meciel's amused laughter was the last thing he heard as he apparated away from his apartment with a small crack, the location of Charity's house firmly imprinted into his mind.

On a suburban street within the third largest city in America loomed a two-story white house. A white picket fence surrounded a well-trimmed green lawn and garden, flowers sprouting out from the soil. Brightly coloured children toys lay scattered over the lawn and parked in the driveway was a blue minivan, the same one that Harry had slashed the tires off in his last visit. The clouds still spat out a rough shower of rain, rumbling ominously as lightning flashed in the distance. It was during one of the peals of thunder that Harry apparated into the street, ducking his head as he was instantly soaked.

"Fucking hell, Meciel," He grumbled under his breath and quickly got off the street, eyeing the house in front of him with a dark frown on his face as he approached the gate. He opened it and stepped onto the small, cobbled path, but he suddenly stopped as he felt a web, or aura of quiet but intense power, a throbbing holiness that seemingly surrounded the entire house.

"The wards didn't hurt me first time but the family had invited me in, so they could have been bypassed," said Harry, hesitation on his face as he suddenly had images of him turning into a small, greasy smear on the Carpenter's driveway. "Will they hurt me now?"

'The wards of Angelic make, designed to keep out dark forces and protect whoever is inside.'

"Angelic, as in real angels? With wings and halos?" Harry asked, raising an eyebrow as his gaze wondered over the house, suddenly feeling a lot warier

‘Yes, beloved, real angels. I do not know if the wards will harm you. However, given all that I know of angelic work and magic, I believe that as long as you have pure intentions, you will be safe.’

Harry frowned and hesitated, his hand lingering on the gate, before he took a deep breath, strengthened his resolve and taking a step forward into the wards with his eyes squeezed shut. Although he had braced himself for pain, he was relieved when he felt the wards part before him like a billowing curtain and let a small grin come over his face. The smile vanished as he remembered why he was here and he quickly walked up the path, the rain beating down on his body as he approached the door and gave a sharp, rap with his knuckles.

There were footsteps from within the house and Harry waited impatiently, the rain soaking into him even further as somebody unlatched the door. The door swung open and a tall woman with dark eyes, silken blonde hair and a polite smile appeared. But her smile disappeared as she laid eyes on Harry, recognition flooding over her features as her face paled, while Harry a little wave with his hand. She tried to slam the door but Harry moved quickly, his foot slamming against the door and the edge, holding it open. Anger sparked in Charity’s eyes, her fear giving away to determination as she pressed herself against the door with all of her strength, but Harry’s first words made her halt.

“Your family is in danger,” The teenage boy said quickly, his green eyes eying Charity carefully, who halted at his statement as the first signs of proper rage washed over her beautiful features.

“Are you threatening my family?” She asked coldly, her voice barely a whisper. “Because if you hurt my children, I will hunt you down.”

“Not me, you idiot,” Harry snapped out in irritation, brushing his water-soaked hair away from his eyes. “If I wanted to kill you, would I have knocked?”

Charity hesitated, her gaze staring at him unblinkingly as Harry let out a small sigh and removed his foot from the door. Instead of slamming it shut, Charity slowly opened it again, her body framing against the

sudden light as a rush of warmth gushed from the house. Charity eyed him coldly, her face as hard as it would be if it had been made out of marble, and Harry began talking.

“Look, your husband recently killed a Fallen named Deirdre,” Harry said impatiently. “Do you know who that is?”

“I’ve heard of the name,” Charity answered, her voice quiet but still loud enough to be heard over the rumbling of the storm.

“Deirdre was the daughter of a powerful Fallen, Nicodemus,” Harry said and saw Charity jerk at the name. He gave a grim smile and continued on. “With her death, Nicodemus lost a lot of power, territory and from what I’ve heard, a lover.”

“You mean...” Charity asked, revulsion twisting her features as she made an odd motion with her hands.

“Yeah,” Harry answered with a quick nod.

“Why are you telling me this?” Charity asked quietly, puzzlement flashing over her face.

“Nicodemus has sworn revenge not only on Michael but his entire family, including his children,” Harry said and watched as Charity flinched with shock, her eyes widening as her gaze darted back into the house. “He’s sworn that he will destroy Michael’s sons and brutalise his daughters. Your sons. Your daughters.”

Charity staggered back, her face paling in dread and she made to turn around, as if she desperately needed to see if her children were alright, but Harry stopped her, grabbing on her warm arm with a strong hand. She whipped around, anger flashing through her stormy eyes.

“Are all of your children at home?” Harry asked quickly, a trace of urgency in his voice, which hardened when Charity didn’t answer the question, her gaze stuck on Harry’s hand clasped around her arm. “Hey! Listen to me, and answer the question! Are they home?”

“Daniel’s driving Alicia to the shops,” She replied faintly. “Mathew, Hope and Harry are home. Amanda is at her magic school with her sister, Molly.”

“Molly, the true-wizard?” Harry asked, frowning in puzzlement. “What’s she doing at a wand-wizard’s school?”

“She’s become a teacher of some sorts,” Charity answered and jerked her arm away from his grip, her eyes furious, but Harry ignored her anger as a speculative look came over his face and he quickly began talking.

“Okay, Amanda and Molly are safer than you are right now,” He murmured, biting down on his lip absently. “Does Daniel or Alicia have a phone with them?”

Charity frowned but nodded slowly, staring at him with a puzzled and confused expression on her face, as if she still didn’t know what was really going on.

“Ring them and tell them to go to a safe place, a holy place if they can,” Harry suggested, brushing away his hair as it splattered in front of his eyes again. Water dripped from his body and although he was partially protected by the waterproof overcoat, he was still getting soaked as he stood outside in the storm. “You should grab your children and get to a safer place as well. The house might protect you from people like me, but normal humans can walk right up and shoot you dead.”

“Why are you helping me?” Charity asked slowly, a faint shine of suspicion lurking in her eyes, her face puzzled.

Harry let out an annoyed sigh, his eyes glinting with irritation.

“You saved my life,” he said with gritted teeth. “I owe you a debt that I’d like to get rid of. I’ve warned you, do what I say and you’ll be safe, and what do you know, the debts been repaid.”

Charity stared at him, suspicion and puzzlement on her face and he rolled eyes, another annoyed sigh escaping him.

“It’s an Old World thing that Meciél insists on following,” He grumbled sourly. “Look, just do whatever you want to do. I warned you. If you don’t listen, it’s not my fault.”

He turned around; preparing to leave the house with a disgruntled look on his face, but it was at that moment that a dark van pulled over on the side of the street, its tyres making a loud, screeching noise as it rolled to a stop in front of the house. He cocked his head, eyeing the van closely as several men jumped out from it, wearing bulky trench coats and cold, hard faces.

“On second thoughts, why don’t you grab your kids and get to the car,” Harry said slowly, moving his head out of the way and letting Charity see the men milling outside her house. “I’ll take care of these guys.”

Charity eyed him for a second, her expression a mixture between puzzlement and gratefulness and she closed her door. Harry could hear her locking it and latching and spun around, striding out into the rain with a brilliant smile on his face.

“Hey!” He called out, grabbing the attention of all six of the men, who regarded him with stony faces and blank eyes. Within his mind, Meciél unleashed a wave of warmth, thawing his chilled bones and energising his body while speaking.

‘Nicodemus finds it amusing to cut the tongues out of his men, to keep them from telling others his secrets. If they are able speak then perhaps they are not his men after all.’

“Could one of you open your mouth?” He asked, still smiling as he tensed, readying himself for combat.

The quick glances between the men were all the confirmation he needed and his smile dropped, his lips curling in anger as he moved with a flash pulling out his revolver and levelling it at the first man. He

pressed the trigger and there was a thundering boom as the man's head flopped back, the bullet killing him instantly as he fell to the ground.

The other men moved fast, their hands flying into their coat as they brought up a variety of automatic weapons. But Harry had dropped his gun then instant he had fired the bullet, his wand whipping up out of his overcoat in his right hand. Wand-magic flowed into him, an icy trickle that Harry channelled through his wand as the men pulled down the triggers on their weapons.

The guns fired, spewing out dozens of bullets in a matter of mere seconds, but they slammed into a burning dome of fiery red and black magic that formed around Harry, who smiled grimly as the bullets cracked and splintered as if they were striking a solid brick wall. Steam billowed out from his magical shield as the clouds continued to spew out rain, water striking the fiery heat and instantly evaporating.

The men stopped firing as they ran out of ammunition, their eyes wide as Harry reached over his shoulder and metal hissed on metal as he drew out his gleaming steel blade, his eyes cold and dangerous. His stance shifted as he delved into the instincts and practical memories of one of Meciél's previous hosts, and he glided forward, his fiery red and golden shield fading away. The sword flashed through the air with a deadly hiss and one man gave a startled scream of pain as he was killed, the blade ripping into his throat, blood splattering towards the muddy ground.

The other men took startled steps backwards, their eyes wide as they quickly and professionally reloaded their weapons, but they weren't quick enough as Harry glided forward, eyes gleaming with battle-lust as he lunged, the sword thrusting into the man. Skin sizzled and blood boiled as Harry withdrew his sword, which had an aura of crimson heat around it, making it seem like the blade was warped and deformed. The body collapsed to the ground and Harry twirled on his feet, disappearing as the men opened fire again, loud, repeated rattles echoing through the soaking street.

He reappeared between two of the men, his eyes alight with pleasure as he slammed the hilt of his sword at the man on his left. The

flaming aura around the sword flared with dark light and Harry heard a loud, cracking noise as the blow burst open the man's skull, blood dribbling from his eyes and nose as he fell limply to the ground, dead or worse. The other man spun around but Harry flicked his sword out, almost casually, and he slammed into the ground, faint surprise and shock showing in his dead eyes as blood flowed from a deep, stomach wound.

The last man gave a wordless cry of rage and fear as he held down the trigger of his gun and although Harry flicked his wand with a quick, sharp movement, a shimmering, almost transparent magical barrier appeared in front of him, one of the bullets glanced past and slammed into his shoulder. The bullet smacked into the bone and Harry felt the first signs of pain as it threatened to flare up into an agonising burning sensation, before he suddenly went completely numb in the shoulder as Meciél made a careful mental adjustment to his perception, blocking out the pain.

“Exturbo Arduro!” Harry snarled out with anger, his eyes almost glowing with rage as he levelled his wand at the man in front of him.

The man, fumbling to reload his weapon again, let out a startled, muffled cry of shock as he was struck- a blast of bright fire and searing heat knocking him off his feet, jutting into his chest and killing him within a second. The man's body slammed into the ground, oily black smoke rising from searing flesh and dispersing in the heavy rain and the clouds above rumbled again, as if they were signalling the end of the battle.

Harry sheathed his sword onto his back, eying his bullet wound with a grimace as he let Meciél's searing power flow out of him, the anger, rage and intoxication that came with it fleeing as quickly as he came. He truly understood how some people could go insane with repeated use of dark powers if it brought along feelings like that. He flicked his wand, almost lazily, and the fallen revolver soared into his hands as Harry turned back to the house, seeing Charity shepherding her children out of the house.

Her eyes were wide with disgust, gratefulness and perhaps a hint of satisfaction as she stared at the bloodied and broken bodies on her

perfectly manicured lawn, placing herself between her children and the view as she moved them towards the van. She ushered her wide-eyed children away from Harry as he approached, his spectre adopting an air of grim satisfaction as he held the gun in his hand.

“Here,” Harry said gruffly, extending out the revolver to the blonde-haired woman, who was quickly becoming soaked as she stared at Harry with a strange expression on her face, as if she couldn’t believe what she was seeing. Slowly, she reached out an arm to take the gun while her children, some as young as nine, others as old as eighteen, watched the exchange with wide-eyes as she huddled behind her.

Harry reached into his coat with his good arm, wincing as he felt the numbness of his shoulder and knowing that he would have to look into the wound soon. He pulled out a fistful of bullets and handed them to the nearest child, a teenage boy with dark hair, who took them with shaking hands as he eyed Harry with something akin to awe on his face.

“Can you get away from here?” Harry asked quietly as he placed his wand back into his coat, water dripping from his hair as lightning flashed in the distance, a thunderous boom accompanying it seconds later.

“Yes,” Charity answered, nodding her head, her eyes never leaving his. “We have a safe place, somewhere where the Fallen will be unable to find us.”

“Good,” Harry declared with something like relief. “The debts almost repaid. Now, about your other children...?”

“I rang Daniel and Alicia and they’re heading to a nearby church,” Charity answered. “The priest there will arrange to get them to the safe place. But I don’t know how to get in touch with Molly or Amanda. They usually send the mail to us.”

Harry froze and let out a wearied sigh, rubbing his face with his good arm as he blinked languidly.

“The school, it's Salem's, right?” He asked with something like resignation in his voice.

Charity nodded. “Amanda will be there, but Molly was leaving for England today for some kind of competition between the different magic schools that Salem's was asked to participate in this year.”

Harry frowned, a touch of dismay on his face, but he nodded.

“I'll get them and warn them,” He said curtly and turned around, readying himself to apparate.

“Thankyou,” Charity called out from behind him, her voice full of gratefulness. “I mean it, thankyou for saving my children's lives.

Harry made a noise alike to gruff dismissal and twirled on his feet, his overcoat flaring over his figure as he apparated away. His last view was of Charity, her face reflecting solemn appreciation, and her children huddled up behind her, before he felt a very unpleasant squeezing sensation as though being sent through a tight rubber tube, as he disappeared from the street, his destination, the closest wand-wizards restaurant near Salem's Wizards and Witches Academy.

At the same time, on the other side of the world, Albus Dumbledore adjusted his half-moon glasses over his pale blue eyes, which twinkled as he watched the Hogwarts students eye the newly arrived Durmstrang students. The foreign students, for the most part, seemed to take the attention well as they milled around, draping their heavy fur coats behind them as they muttered to each other in thick, dark voices, eying the castle behind Dumbledore, seemingly impressed. Near them, a small group of Beauxbatons students let out a wave of giggles as they eyed one of the more handsome sixth-year Slytherin, who gave a lazy smile and waved at them. Dumbledore shook his head with amusement, his eyes twinkling madly as a small smile curved his aged lips, but his smile faded ever-so slightly as his gaze came upon the two heads of the other schools.

Olympe Maxime was conversing quietly with Igor Kakaroff, who had an especially smug expression on his face as Madame Maxime let out a loud, roaring laugh, her voice far deeper than many of the seventh year males at Hogwarts. Albus watched the two carefully, dipping his head and flashing a polite smile when Olympe glanced his way, and he held his smile as he observed Kakaroff. He knew that the man had been a Death Eater during Lord Voldemort's rise to power and had committed some terrible atrocities, although many were never proven. He also knew that the man had been given a reprieve from his sentence for his apparent willingness after Voldemort was banished by young Harry Potter. Still, Albus made a mental note to keep a wary eye on the man, especially with regards to this very important event. It wouldn't do for any of the other school champions to be endangered merely so Kakaroff could secure a win for Durmstrang.

He moved his gaze away from Kakaroff and Maxime and clasped his hands together as he waited for the last and newest competitor to arrive. The invitation had been extended to Salem's Wizards and Witches Institute after some heated debate between the various international committees. The last time the tournament had run, Salem's was no more than a temporary shelter for magical children. However, times had changed and the school had become a formidable institution in its own right, lending credence to Salem's demands to be allowed to enter the tournament. Naturally, Headmaster Kakaroff had strongly disapproved of the idea, stating

that tradition dictated that only three schools were to participate in the Tri-wizard Tournament. But with the combined efforts of Madame Maxime and Albus himself, they had been able to get Salems as an official competitor in the Tri-wizard tournament, or was it the Quad-wizard tournament now?

Suddenly Albus noticed a soft, sparkle of light that appeared in front of the lake, a gentle mote of golden light that floated towards the ground. His eyes twinkled as the first of the students noticed what was happening, their mutterings dieing down as a few more sparkles of light appeared, glowing beautifully in beneath the shimmering moon. Albus watched carefully as he felt the first presence of powerful magic, which was quite impressive if not a little crude, as more and more sparkles started to shower down from the sky. Bright silver and luminescent golden motes quickly started appearing in droves, a soft and beautiful glow shining out onto the awe-struck crowd. The sparkles kept appearing in soft flares of light as they materialised into existence until a brightly glittering fog settled over the lakeshore. Albus watched with a pleasant smile on his face as dark figures emerged from the fog.

Two lines of figures walked out of the sparkling mist and into the full view of the assembly. They were dressed dark-red robes, their faces wide with excitement as they stared at Hogwarts with awe, the castle shimmering with hundreds of lights as it loomed up into the night sky. The students were led by a severe and ancient looking wizard with a large, droopy moustache and soft brown eyes. Supervising the students was a tall girl with blonde hair and a pretty face. She was a little older than most of the students but carried herself different, her eyes bright but wary and on impulse, Albus carefully extended his senses. A tingle of shock flared through it but he kept it carefully hidden as he withdrew his mind. Why in Merlin's name was there a true-wizard here? Albus noticed that the girl was eyeing him carefully, having felt his careful scan, and he felt her probe leap forward, all force and no subtlety as it struck his aura, but Albus easily shook it off and gave the girl a smile, who looked shocked as she stared at him with wide eyes.

“Headmaster Dumbledore,” called out the ancient wizard, his voice quavering with age as he limped forward, extending out a wrinkled old hand as a smile came over his face.

Albus let a beaming come over his face as he jovially strode forward, clasping the ancient wizard's hand with his own. The wizard squeezed back with far more strength than many would have expected from such an old man while the woman watched on with narrowed eyes

“Headmaster Smith,” Albus said warmly. “It is a pleasure to see you once more. How have you been?”

“Quite good, quite good,” Smith said, his voice almost a croak and he turned away and let out a hacking cough. Albus watched with slight concern as Smith sighed wearily, wiping his mouth with his hand and turning back to Albus. “My, the weather is quite cold here, isn't it?”

“Indeed it is,” answered Albus, concern in his eyes as he gazed at his sick friend. “Should the cold ever bother you, we have a well-staffed infirmary here run by a most excellent Healer who would be more than happy to prescribe you a pepper-up potion.”

“That is very kind of you, Albus,” The ancient man said gratefully, and then gestured for the blonde true-wizard to come over. “This is Molly Carpenter. She's our new teacher of Alternative Magics and the Old World. It's been an enormous success so far and most students seem to enjoy it.”

“Indeed?” murmured Albus, his voice light and jubilant as he turned to the young woman, a welcoming smile on his face. “Welcome to Hogwarts, Miss Carpenter. I do hope that you enjoy your stay here.”

“Thankyou, Headmaster Dumbledore,” said Molly, her voice soft as she stared at him with a strange expression on her face. Albus supposed that she had encountered very few wand-wizards who could block her naturally more powerful abilities and his smile widened, crinkles centring around his blue eyes.

“Molly here was the one that signed the contract in my stead,” Headmaster Smith said, wheezing a little as he placed a wrinkled hand over his chest, giving another soft cough. “My heart just isn’t what it’s used to be and the new potions can make me a little drowsy.”

“Ah,” Albus said and turned to Molly, a small smile on his face and a twinkle in his eyes. “Are you interested in continuing your lessons here?”

“If you have the room,” Molly answered quietly.

“We don’t offer such a course here but I daresay that I can work up something,” Albus said, his eyes light with humour and amusement as he stared down the true-wizard, who eyed him back with a mixture of confidence and hesitance, as if she didn’t know what to make of him.

“Grand, just grand,” Headmaster Smith wheezed. “As a thankyou, let me offer an invitation to any students from Hogwarts who may be interested in the class.”

“That is kind of you,” said Albus, his long beard quivering as he bowed his head towards the ancient wizard, who suddenly shuddered as a cool gust of wind swept through the assembly area. Around them, students were already being dismissed and heading back inside the warm castle and Albus offered his arm to the Salem Headmaster, who took it with a grateful hand. “Now, shall we make our way inside? It’s a little chilly out here, if I do say so myself.”

Harry’s apparated into a backroom of a small, wand-wizarding restaurant, his face twisted into a grimace as he walked forward, his hand hovering above the bullet wound in his shoulder. It was still numb and Harry couldn’t feel a thing from it, but as Meciél had told him countless times, pain was the body’s way of telling the brain that it was being damaged and just because Harry was ignoring the message signal didn’t mean that he could ignore the damage.

“How bad is it?” He asked softly, his voice quite loud as it bounced off the insulated walls.

‘The damage is minimal,’ Meciél said. ‘Once you remove the bullet, I can begin healing it.’

“Should I summon it out of the wound?” Harry asked, giving his wand an idle flick for good measure and seeing a small shower of glittering sparks burst from the tip of the gleaming holly-wood.

‘You could do that if you wished to literally shoot yourself,’ Meciél said, her voice stern. ‘The summoning charm is not a precise art and the bullet can cause more, permanent damage if it is forced out in the wrong direction. No, beloved, I suggest that you wait.’

“You’re the boss,” Harry muttered as he opened the door. The sounds of clinking dishes and chattering laughter drifted into his ears as he left the sound-proofed room, which had been designed as a small platform where wand-wizards could apparate to safely without disturbing any potential muggles that could walk into the restaurant.

Harry walked down a small corridor and entered a larger room, where several people sat at small tables with plates of steaming food in front of them. Harry didn’t take notice of them as he passed a small bar, ignoring an inquisitive look from the bartender as he opened the door, bells clanging against each other, and left the restaurant. The patrons didn’t even look up as he stalked off, content in their conversations and food.

“That’s it, right?” Harry muttered to himself as he approached a pair of sturdy, steel-wrought gates. Behind them loomed a large, modern-looking building, at least four stories high. The sun glared brightly in the sky, the weather far different here than it was in Chicago, dulling on the tinted-windows. There were several small buildings located around what seemed more like a university campus than a school for magic. A large, thick wall of stone surrounded the school and at the gates, nestled between the stone and steel, was a small guardhouse.

‘I believe so, beloved. Neither I or any of my previous hosts have been here and the information that I...received...from my kin does not contain anything useful either.’

Harry frowned and approached the small gate-house, knocking on the window with his knuckles as he peered inside. A flabby man dressed in a security guard’s uniform looked up from his magazine, his face distinctly bored as he eyed Harry, covering his mouth as he gave a slow yawn.

“Sorry kid, the campus is invite only,” said the guard in a monotone voice, as if he had said the same line over and over again.

“I’m looking for a student inside,” Harry told the guard quietly, his eyes flickering around as he searched for any presence of Nicodemus’ goons. “It’s a family emergency.”

‘Like I said kid,’ The guard grunted, not caring as he sat back down, picking up his magazine and flopping back to his page. “Invite only. You need to have special talents to get into the school. Wait until your friend has finished their classes.”

“Well, I suppose it’s a good thing that I have a wand, then,” Harry said coolly and the man’s head jerked up, his eyes widening as Harry wagged a wand in front of the window. The guard frowned in irritation as he stood up again and moved for the door.

“Well, why didn’t you say so in the first place?” He muttered under his breath as he opened the door and ushered Harry inside.

Harry blinked as he stepped the dingy little gate-house and let out an involuntary gasp of shock as his eyes widened. The inside of the gate-house was far larger than it looked on the outside, a large expanse of tiled floors. A fireplace flared with heat and flame on the other side of the room, cracking softly in the warm room. There was a small but elegantly carved fountain depicting a woman dressed in a witch’s robe, holding up a wand in an eternal symbol of defiance.

“So, what’s the problem?” The guard asked with a yawn, sitting back in his chair as he gazed at Harry with a bored expression.

“It’s a family emergency,” Harry said, drawing his eyes away from the unexpected scenery and focussing them on the guard in front of him. “I need to speak to Amanda and Molly Carpenter, right now.”

The guard frowned and languidly waved his wand, and a filing cabinet on the other side of the room burst open as a battered scroll shot out of it and zoomed through the air, landing in the man’s hands. He unravelled it, frowning as he trailed his finger down the piece of parchment.

“Well, Amanda Carpenter has her lunch break now,” The guard said, squinting at the piece of paper. “You could try the cafeteria. I don’t know where that teacher is though.”

“The cafeteria,” Harry murmured. “So, where is that exactly?”  
Five minutes later, Harry stalked into a decently sized room, his eyes gazing around the room as a frown appeared on his face. At the far end of the cafeteria was a serving bench of sorts was wrinkled, sun-tanned robed witch served a short queue of crimson-robed students that had lined up behind it. Light filtered in from both walls, large windows showing the clear, blue sky outside. Unlit old-fashioned torches had been clamped to the pale walls and next to two of these torches was a small sign labelled ‘THINGS NOT TO DO! DETENTIONS WILL APPLY!’

Dozens of small, rectangular plastic tables had been laid out around the cafeteria and around the tables sat more crimson-robed students, chatting with each other with bright smiles and quick gestures with their hands. Harry frowned as he scanned the tables. He saw several girls his age, all with blonde hair, but he dismissed them when he got a better look at their features as he slowly walked through the cafeteria, ignoring the inquisitive and interested looks he received. He supposed that he must have been a sight, a pale, dark-haired boy with a thick overcoat draped over him and an icy cold look in his eyes.

Finally, he spotted a small mane of dirty-blond hair on one of the tables on his left and he strode over without a second thought, dodging around a table of burly boys and ducking as a girl with a full tray rushed past him, until he had reached the table and had plopped himself down on the seat, aware of the incredulous gaze of the three girls sitting there already.

“Amanda,” greeted Harry, a smile on his face. “It’s so nice to see you again.”

The girl in front of him blinked as she squinted at him, and her grey eyes widened with shock and perhaps a bit of fear as she gaped at him, dropping the spoon full of food she had in her hands on the table. Harry let a smirk come over his face as he appraised the girl. She had changed in the three years since he had seen her, her body growing out a bit more. She had grown a lot taller and she seemed to be a little bigger than Harry was. At the moment, her mouth was opening and closing like a fish as she blinked, apparently too startled to speak.

“Amanda, who’s this?” One of the other girls, a dainty brunette asked, eying Harry with a small smile on her face, while the other girl, another blonde, giggled softly.

“You know, I never really got his name,” Amanda said faintly, leaning back as she slowly slipped her hand into her robes, most likely going for her wand.

“Oh, Amanda, naughty” The other girl giggled and nudged her brunette friend as the two of them dissolved into secretive giggles, eyeing Amanda and Harry with speculative eyes.

“Okay, you two leave the table,” Harry snapped, a scowl of anger appearing on his face and he glowered at the girls, gesturing them away with his hands. “Go on, scram!”

The girls exchanged mysterious looks with each other and giggled again, their high-pitch voices grating on Harry’s nerves, but they stood up with their trays. The brunette gave what she thought was a

saucy wink and the two of them sauntered off, still giggling with each other.

“Are you here to kill me?” Amanda asked quietly, a flicker of fear appearing in her eyes as she desperately tried to compose her face and failed miserably. “Because there are a lot of people here and they won’t let you get away with it.”

“Does everybody in your family have to ask me that?” Harry muttered to himself, before his face hardened as he stared at Amanda with a serious expression on his face. “Look, you’re family is in danger.”

“Er...is that a threat?” Amanda asked slowly, eying Harry carefully.

Harry let out a wearied sigh, rolling his eyes in a mixture of resignation and annoyance.

“You really are your mother’s daughter, aren’t you?” He snapped and Amanda blinked in confusion. “For starters, my name is Harry, for the record. Now, listen to me. Your father’s night job has pissed off a very evil person and he’s sworn to kill you and all of your brothers and sisters. Because of some flaky half-arsed debt I owe your family, I’m going to save your lives, even though you all bug the crap out of me.”

“What?” Amanda exclaimed, surprise twisting on her face, but she ducked her head as her classmates stared at her and lowered her voice. “Slow down for a second and say that again!”

“Oh, for fuck’s sake,” Harry growled out softly and reached over, clapping one of Amanda’s hands and staring in her eyes, his serious icy emerald eyes meeting her emotional grey orbs. “Long story short. There’s an evil person who wants to kill you and your entire family. My name is Harry and I’m here to rescue you, and if you quote Star Wars on me, I will slap you.”

Amanda stared at him, annoyance flashing on her features for an instant before his words hit her and she paled. She tugged her hand away from Harry's, her face panicked and her eyes wide with fear.

"What about my family? Are they safe? Did daddy send you?" She rattled off quietly; her grey eyes intense as Harry leant back, already waving off her concerns.

"Your Mom and your brothers and sisters are safe," Harry said. "I was able to intercept the assassins. Your family lived, the other guys didn't."

It was at that moment that Amanda's gaze drifted to a small rip in Harry's overcoat and her eyes widened as she saw a small, almost unnoticeable splatter of blood oozing onto the dark material.

"You're bleeding!" She whispered frantically, gesturing at his shoulder with wide eyes.

"Really?" Harry deadpanned. "Because I didn't know people bled after they were shot. Can we get back to you now? Where's your older sister, Molly?"

"She's not here," Amanda answered slowly, suddenly gazing at Harry with a peculiar expression on her face. "She's gone with the delegation of students to England for some tournament. Did you really get shot saving my family?"

"No, I decided to shoot myself just for the hell of it," Harry said sarcastically and gave the girl an annoyed frown. "Look, can you stop asking stupid questions so we can leave before Nicodemus' men show up to kill you, and can you tell me why that guy on the other table there is staring at me like he wants to kill me?"

Amanda flicked her gaze to the side and then back again, her expression nonplussed.

“Ex-boyfriend,” She answered absently, before returning her gaze towards Harry as she pushed her lunch tray away, fumbling for the small bag at her side. “Where are we going?”

“For now, my place in Chicago,” Harry answered as the two of them stood up.

“You’re still in Chicago?” Amanda blinked in surprise. “I thought that you had left because daddy lived so close.”

“Which is why I didn’t leave,” Harry said, frowning as he and Amanda began to walk out of the cafeteria. “Besides, I like my apartment.”

“Hey!” Somebody called out behind them, a rough, annoyed voice, and Harry and Amanda turned around as the large boy who had been glaring at them before approached, his fists clenched and his lips clamped down in possessive anger. “That’s my girlfriend, you know?”

“We broke up two days ago,” Amanda spat out angrily, her cheeks blotching with fury, and Harry blinked at the sudden transformation, an approving smile coming over his face. “So, go away Greg!”

“Your boy seems to have anger problems,” Harry said mildly, a wicked smile on his face as he eyed the jealous guy. “I know a dog trainer that can whip that right out of him.”

Amanda snorted but her anger faded as Harry grabbed her arm, dragging her out of the cafeteria amidst a sea of stares and into one of the hallways. Amanda jerked her arm out of his grip and scowled at him, but he just shook his head in amusement, a small smile on his face.

“Well, it looks like the angel has some horns,” Harry said, his voice thick with laughter as they walked down the hallway.

“Oh, shut up,” Amanda muttered, her cheeks suffusing with red as she blushed.

Harry just gave her wicked smile as they turned a corner, but the smile faded as he heard pounding footsteps behind him and he instinctively reached for Meciél's power. His eyes glittered as rage and malevolence flooded into his mind as a roaring cascade of heat and fire seared into him and he spun around, prepared to slaughter any of Nicodemus' goons.

But it was only the boy, Greg, from before, his face set in anger as he stalked forward, his glare landing on Amanda as spittle fell from his mouth as he started shouting at her, fury laced in his voice.

"How could you do that in front of my team-mates?" shouted the boy, his eyes furious. "After everything I did for you! After I helped make you popular and brought you to the parties. You're a sad, little bitch, do you know that? Chasing after this moron only two days after breaking up with me! You must be some kind of little slut..."

It was at this point that Harry felt Amanda flinch and he growled in annoyance, surging forward far quicker than Greg would have expected, his demonic rage granting him strength as adrenaline soared through his veins. With a single deft movement, Harry snapped his hand out, gripped a lock of the blonde boy's hair and slammed the head into the wall. There was a cracking noise as Harry drew back then head, and then slammed it into the wall again, again and again, until there was a bloody smear dripping from the pale-blue paint and Harry let the boy go, who fell to the ground in a sobbing heap, his face a literal mess.

"My god," Amanda breathed as she stared at the boy in horror, but Harry just grunted as he grabbed her arm and dragged her away from the hallway, turning a corner and approaching the gate-house. "Why did you do that?"

"I dunno. It seemed like the right thing to do at the time." Harry shrugged as he let Meciél's power fade away, his mind clearing up, but the sharp satisfaction stayed with him as he entered the gate-house room, not even acknowledging the guard as he exited, returning to the street.

“You could have really hurt him!” Amanda cried out, trying to loosen Harry’s firm grip on her arm without much success.

“That was the point,” Harry said in annoyance as Amanda struggled against him. “Now...”

His voice trailed off as he stopped, eying two brown-robed wizards who had just walked out of the restaurant. Although they looked like normal men, each sporting sandy hair and average faces, Harry could sense that something was wrong with them. There was something beneath their surface, something they just felt wrong, and Harry took a deep breath as they approached him, their faces casual but their eyes glinting with something dark.

“Hey, would you know where Amanda Carpenter is?” One of the men asked casually, a polite smile on his face. But the smile faded as he suddenly swivelled his gaze to Harry, his eyes widening as if he could see something about the boy that Harry couldn’t.

“He’s like the master,” The other man muttered worriedly, his wand flying into his hand as he observed Harry carefully.

“The renegade!” The first man hissed and suddenly his wand appeared in his hand. “Kill him!”

Harry reacted quickly, dragging Amanda down as his wand flew into his hand, his eyes narrowing in anger. He moved just in time as a jet of eerie green light burst from the first man’s wand, accompanied by the sound of a powerful roaring wind, and zoomed over their heads.

He came up, his wand flicking in the air as he hurled aside a bolt of cackling yellow power, which slammed into the footpath and dissipated into thin steam, leaving scorch marks on the concrete. An instant later, a shimmering globe of faint-green and blue energy surrounded him as a flash of intense purple light streaked forward from the first man’s wand, shattering on the defensive magic in front of Harry.

“Siargrus!” Harry hissed, and the cold energy of wand-magic flowed through him, detectable to Meciél’s powerful and enhanced senses. A shimmering pulse of near invisible magic struck the ground near the two brown-robed wizard’s feet, both who took a startled step backwards. The ground shuddered as steam arose from it and in no more than a second or two, the concrete was glowing red-hot as it was turned into magma, a searing wave of heat escaping the patch of liquefying rock.

The heat was enough to make the two wizards stagger backwards, clutching their faces for protection and Harry let out a vicious snarl, wanting nothing more than to continue the fight, but he turned around and hoisted Amanda up, who had watched the five-second duel with wide eyes. Claspng her by the arm, he concentrated for a brief instant and then disappeared, taking Amanda with him and leaving the brown-robed wizards alone.

Harry apparated into the training room of his apartment, Amanda clutched tightly on his arm. The minute the two were standing on solid ground, Amanda let out a small gasp, her eyes wide as she loosened her grip on Harry’s arm and fell to the floor, panting heavily as her blonde hair fell over her shoulders, covering her face.

“Never apparated before?” Harry asked, watching her suffering with a smile of amusement on his face as he placed his wand back into his robes.

“That was apparition?” Amanda gasped, shaking her head dazedly and staggering back to her feet. “I thought I was going to die, and on that subject, who were they?”

“The evil guy I told you about, they were his assassins,” Harry said bluntly. “They were there to kill you, or worse.”

“Oh,” Amanda said softly, her face paling as the adrenaline left her body and the shock of realising how close to death she came slammed into her. Her legs suddenly felt weak, but she took a deep breath to calm herself and eyed Harry with gratitude. “Thanks.”

“I don’t want thanks,” Harry muttered, grimacing as he touched his shoulder wound, noting the blood staining on his overcoat. “I want the debt removed.”

Amanda didn’t say anything as she glanced around the apartment, her eyes flickering with interest as she took in the scratched runes in the wooden walls and the larger and smaller circles on the ground. Meanwhile, Harry walked across the training room and opened his bedroom door, entering and carefully taking off his overcoat. He threw it on his bed and unstrapped the sword from his back and the empty gun holster from his hip. Amanda followed him in and her eyes bulged at the luxurious state of his room, an appreciative smile on her face as she took in the fur rugs, the silk sheets, the large bed and the expensive cabinet and polished oak table.

“Wow,” She murmured, impressed at what she was seeing. “This doesn’t look like the room of a demon.”

“You’d be surprised,” Harry said absently as he walked over to one of the cabinets. “We do like our comforts.”

“So, why are you helping us?” Amanda asked in curiosity, eyeing Harry as he pulled out a small pouch from his drawer and tossed it on his bed. “You said something about a debt?”

“I have a debt to your father for not killing me, even if that Sanya fellow did stab me,” Harry grumbled, his displeasure at the notion shining in his eyes. “And I have a greater debt to your family for patching me up. I’d like to get rid of it and somehow this seems like the best way.”

“Oh,” Amanda said softly, watching him with a strange expression on her face, one that Harry didn’t recognise, before it cleared away and she let out a smile which lit up her entire face. “See, you’re not such a bad guy.” She teased.

Harry made a scoffing noise as he sat down on the bed, opening up the small pouch and rummaging through something inside.

“So you say your sister isn’t here in American?” He said, and Amanda nodded.

“She’s at the British school, Hogwarts,” The blonde girl answered quietly. “She only just left an hour ago.

‘Hogwarts is one of the most advanced schools of magic in all of Europe. I believe that it is the same school your parents went to, but I do not know anything about a tournament.’ Meciell said quietly in Harry’s thoughts.

“So, what are we going to do now?” Amanda asked heavily, and stared at Harry with expectant grey eyes as she awaited his answer.

Harry frowned, the brows on his forehead creasing and didn’t answer, apparently deep in thought as he gave the question serious consideration. Now what was he meant to do? He had saved the family and saved the brat. Now he had found out that the last person he needed to warn was on the other side of the world, and a scowl appeared on his face.

Amanda sighed and waved a hand in front of Harry’s scowling face, Harry blinking as his startled gaze met hers, irritation brewing in his eyes.

“Hello? I asked you a question.” She said slowly.

“And I’d give you an answer if you would just shut up,” Harry snapped, and focussed his gaze back in the pouch as he found what he wanted.

Amanda watches him, a small smile on her face as she shook her head in amusement.

“You haven’t changed much, have you?”

“Again with the talking.” Harry muttered as he pulled out a long, shiny pair of silver tweezers, giving them an experiment jab, before he placed them on his lap and took off his ripped shirt.

Amanda watched, her cheeks suffusing with blood as she put on a bewildered smile.

“Is this...um...a striptease,” She asked, her voice trying and failing to be playful, but Harry didn’t seem to notice as he threw the shirt aside and picked up the tweezers.

“No,” Harry said impatiently “One of the men sent to kill your mother shot me and the bullet isn’t going to remove itself.”

Amanda’s attempts at humour faded away as concern flooded her features and she made to move forward, but Harry waved her away with a hand, throwing an annoyed glare at her.

“Look, this is delicate so sit over there, shut up and let me work,” He said, wincing as he regarded the small, gritty hole in his shoulder. He jerked his head up to the side as he slowly inserted the tweezers into the bullet wounds. “The toilet’s that way. If you need to go, go now. We’re going as soon as I’m done.”

“Where are we going?” Amanda asked quietly as Harry dug into his bloodied wound, his faced screwed up in concentration as he followed Miciel’s advice within his head and began the extraction of the bullets with careful, steady fingers.

“Scotland,” Harry grunted, pulling out a small piece of metal from his shoulder and throwing it to the ground. “Now shut up!”

Note 1: I have decided against using the idea of soul-gazing from the Dresden Files. It would needlessly complicate things

Approximately thirty minutes later, just on the outskirts of the small, all-magical town of Hogsmeade, there was a brief, flash of dim blue light and two figures appeared from out of nowhere, falling to the ground in a rough, tangled heap as the international portkey deposited them from the United States of America and into Scotland. Normally, professionally-made international portkeys were much smoother and less disorientating, but Harry wasn't a professional and his crude, basic mimic was barely able to transport people, let alone offer a comfortable ride.

For a moment, the two people lay strewn over the grass, limbs entangled together as they tried to shake off their disorientation. Harry was the first to recover, probably due to the influence of Meciél, and sat up, rubbing his head with a wince.

“That could have gone a little better,” He muttered to himself as he carefully untangled himself from Amanda's legs, his deft fingers quickly unravelling the strands of blonde hair caught on his arm,.

‘I agree, beloved.’ Meciél said in amusement. ‘Still, it was a reasonable attempt for somebody of your skill level. From what I can understand, the creation of such items is complex. You did rather well for a beginner.’

“Ow,” Amanda muttered painfully, wincing and touching her head as Harry stood up, his eyes flickering with amusement. He loomed above her, watching her struggles to stand with a small smile on his face, before he reached down and clasped a strong hand around her wrist, yanking her up.

Amanda let out a startled yelp but managed to keep her balance when Harry let go, his eyes scanning the darkened surroundings warily, pulling out his wand and performing a wordless lumos charm. The tip of his wand glowed with a powerful light, which drove away the darkness in a small area surrounding the duo, revealing soft, green grass and the edge of a dark forest.

“Whoa,” Harry heard Amanda mutter with awe and frowned, glancing over at her and seeing that her gaze was fixated on something behind him. He turned around and saw what she was looking at as he struggled not to gape. A large castle loomed up ahead, glowing with hundreds, if not thousands of twinkling lights, which glittered on the large lake that surrounded it. In the distance, visible because of the brilliant light that the castle was emitting, there was a set of large stands and odd objects protruding out of the ground. The castle, surrounded by looming mountains, radiated a sense of homeliness and majesty, its splendour visible to even one such as Meciél as she spoke softly into his mind.

‘That must be Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, one of the most prized magical institutions in all of Europe. It certainly is an awe-inspiring sight, is it not?’

Harry couldn’t disagree with her there but he remembered the reason for his visit and tore his eyes away from the magnificent sight, and turned around. Amanda was still staring at the castle when Harry poked her in the arm with his finger, and she let out a startled squeak of surprise as she was snapped out of her stupor, whipping around with her blonde hair flying around her shoulders, her eyes wide.

“That hurt,” She growled out, the shock fading from her face as she remembered where she was and who she was with.

“Did you just squeak?” Harry asked, eyeing her with amusement and Amanda’s cheek flushed as she looked away from him. But the boy didn’t seem to be interested in annoying her any further as he gestured towards the castle with his wand, which was still glowing as it illuminated the area.

“That’s Hogwarts,” He said. “That’s where your sister is. So, let’s go and get her.”

Amanda nodded and withdrew her own wand, a slimmer piece of oak wood to Harry’s holly, and gave it a short wave.

“Lumos!” She chanted softly, and smiled in satisfaction as the tip of her wand flared in a powerful, soft light, blending in with Harry’s so that it seemed as if the sun was beaming down on a small circle around the pair.

Harry shook his head and rolled his eyes at Amanda’s exuberance and started the walk up the soft, grassy hill, heading towards the giant, looming castle ahead. Amanda walked by his side, oblivious to Harry’s tense expression and poised body as his eyes darted around him, searching for any potential assassins that Nicodemus might have sent.

“So,” Amanda said after a minute of silence. “What have you been up to since I last saw you?”

Harry turned an irritated glare towards her, but she barely seemed to notice it as she continued staring at the twinkling castle ahead.

“Why do you care?” He asked in annoyance.

“I don’t know,” Amanda admitted. “I’ve been told all my life that you people were evil and not to be trusted but you just saved my life, and my family’s. I guess I’m just interested.”

“I’m clearing a debt before your father has the chance to call me up on it,” Harry said flatly. “Nothing more.”

“Right,” Amanda said slowly, a small smile curving her lips. “Well, I don’t believe you.”

Harry halted, ceasing his vigilant watch over the surroundings and turning to her with a dangerous look in his eyes as he scowled at her.

“Excuse me?” He asked incredulously.

“I don’t believe you,” Amanda said, but her smile faltered under his powerful glare and her grey eyes flickered nervously. “I think that underneath, you’re a good person.”

“And just when I thought you couldn’t get any worse,” Harry muttered, rubbing his hand through his hair in irritation.

“You could have let us die,” Amanda said, almost in triumph, but she licked her lips uncertainly. “Today, and three years ago, you could have killed us all. My daddy was very surprised when he heard about what had happened. He said that you were different, that a normal Fallen would have killed us.”

“Well, apparently your ‘daddy’ doesn’t know jack-shit about me,” Harry grumbled as he started walking again. “And either do you.”

“Still,” Amanda pressed on. “There’s gotta be some good in you or else you wouldn’t have done this.”

“Amanda, do me a favour,” Harry said, gritting his teeth in annoyance. “Shut up.”

“Why?” Amanda said, a smile curving her lips as she stared at him, her grey eyes sparkling. “Am I hitting too close to home?”

“No,” Harry said coldly. “The more you talk, the less likely I’m going to hear any assassins creeping up behind us.”

Amanda’s smile faltered and she shivered, moving in closer with Harry as she picked up her pace, her eyes worried. She glanced around the darkness with a touch of fear as the reality of her situation struck her, while Harry kept walking forward, a smile of satisfaction on his face.

A few minutes later, Harry and Amanda approached a set of large, creaky iron gates, built into a thick wall of stone that seemingly surrounded the half the castle, stopping at the edge of the large forest and at the edge of the glimmering lake. Harry frowned as he halted, barely noticing Amanda stopping next to him as he reached out with his senses. There was a powerful, low-pitched hum in front of him, barely noticeable even with Meciél’s influence, but when he investigated it further, power flooded into his senses. It bore the signature mark of the same, cool power that all wand-wizards drew

on, except it was far more powerful than he had ever felt before, a web of interwoven magic that seemed to be as strong as steel.

“Harry?” Amanda asked quietly, staring at him with traces of concern on her features. “What’s wrong?”

“The wards start here,” Harry said, eyeing the gates with a careful look. “And I have no idea if they’re going to turn me into a puddle of goo if I cross them.”

Amanda frowned, suddenly eyeing the gates with a little more caution as she raised her wand, shining the bright light flaring from the tip as if she were trying to see the wards. Harry stared at her and shook his head in despair, turning back to the wards and examining them closely.

“Meciel, what do you think?” He murmured out loud, and Amanda started as she stared at him, her eyes a little wide as if she had just remembered that he had a demon in his mind.

‘The wards are very powerful, beloved, and very comprehensive,’ Meciel said, her voice contemplative as he analysed what Harry was feeling with a degree of mastery that the teenager would never obtain. ‘I cannot be certain that they will not harm you should you enter.’

“Does the...Fallen...have any ideas?” Amanda asked hesitantly. “Can you get rid of them or something?”

“A Faerie queen would have trouble ripping down these wards,” Harry said, frowning as he withdrew his senses. “Besides, we just want to grab your sister and leave. We’re not looking to invade the place.”

“Oh.”

“And her name is Meciel,” Harry added as he pursed his lips thoughtfully.

Amanda blinked.

“What?”

“It’s not ‘Fallen’,” Harry said absently. “Her name is Meciél.”

Amanda was saved from responding as somebody’s voice boomed out from beyond the gates, probably attracted by the bright lights emanating from Harry and Amanda’s wands.

“Who goes there?” The voice called out in a thick accent, loud and deep as an enormous figure stamped its way out of the darkness, peering at the gates as he held a small, glowing lantern in his giant hand.

Amanda let out a little gasp and even Harry raised an eyebrow as the man appeared, towering at least twice as tall as the average man and nearly five times as wide. He had an enormously thick, bushy black beard, which was scattered with grey hair, and long, wild dark hair. A warm face stared at them, laugh-lines crinkling around the emotional black eyes, and a friendly smile on his face.

Harry nudged Amanda with his elbow as he lowered his wand, the light dimming and disappearing from the tip of it as he slightly drew back into the shadows. He knew that the wand-wizards considered him to be some kind of hero for his defeat in the dark lord who had murdered his parents, and in turn had been murdered by Harry. He also knew that his scar was rather famous, which was why he hid it behind his bangs, and that if he were recognised, his little plan of running incognito would fail.

“Er...Hello?” Amanda said hesitantly, flicking her gaze towards Harry, who motioned for her to continue. “My name is Amanda Carpenter. I’m looking for sister; she arrived with the Salem students.”

“You came all this way?” The man asked with an atrocious accent, frowning underneath his beard. “Why?”

“Family emergency?” Amanda replied quickly, although the statement seemed more like a question, but the man seemed to accept that as he idly scratched his thick beard with his meaty hand, eying Harry’s shadowed figure, squinting as he tried to pierce through the darkness. Amanda saw his gaze. “That’s a family friend. He’s really...involved...with what’s happening.”

“Okay,” The man grunted after a moment’s hesitation, wrenching at the gates with one, powerful tug. The iron gates swung open with a loud creaking noise, making Amanda and Harry wince as it drove into their skulls, but Harry could feel the wards temporarily dispersing at the entrance of the school as the man gestured them forward. “I’ll take you to the school entrance, but I’ll leave you there. That beautiful Maxime brought some real nice pegasi with her and I gotta go feed the beauts.”

“Pegasi?” Amanda echoed as she and Harry stepped through the gates. “Like, horses with wings?”

“Yeah,” the man grunted as he began to walk towards the castle.

“That’s so cool,” Amanda said with a beam her face, her eyes glazing over as a wistful smile curved her lips, and in the shadows, Harry rolled his eyes.

Amanda and the man, who identified himself as Rubeus Hagrid, groundskeeper and keeper of keys of Hogwarts, continued chatting as they walked up the cobbled pathway towards the castle that lay ahead. Voices, one high-pitched with excitement and eagerness and the other low, gruff with amusement, echoed into the night. Trailing after the two, Harry winced every time a particularly loud word struck him, exasperation on his face as he kept scanning the darkness.

“Way to go, idiots,” He muttered darkly, his wand clasped tightly in his hands. “Why don’t you let off a few fireworks instead? It’d be a lot quieter.”

‘You are in a foul mood tonight, beloved.’ Meciél said within him.

“Can you blame me?” Harry asked softly, his voice barely a whisper.

‘No, not particularly,’ Meciél said in amusement.

After a few minutes of walking, Hagrid had led them up the path and through a large, stone archway. Beyond the archway lay a relatively large courtyard, trees shooting up from small, grassy patches and lights twinkling from the windows in the stone, buildings above. Warmth and a soft whisper of chatter escaped at the end of the courtyard, flowing out through the open doors. It was here that Hagrid left them, giving Amanda a cheery wave goodbye as he turned around and disappeared into the darkness again.

“Finally,” Harry muttered as he stalked down the courtyard, and Amanda had to jog to catch up with him as she took in irritated stance and wisely remained silent as the two of them entered the door.

Amanda let out a quiet sigh of appreciation as warmth struck her bones, rubbing her arms together as she glanced at Harry, noticing that the boy looked totally unaffected by the chilly weather. She frowned but followed him as the two of them walked forward, passing gleaming suits of armour and moving portraits until they had reached a pair of closed doors. Beyond the doors, Harry could hear the talking and laughing of hundreds of students and the clinking of glasses and cutlery.

“This is the Great Hall,” Harry said as he spun around, his eyes gazing at Amanda. “I need you to go and get your sister”

“Why don’t you go and get her?” Amanda asked, her brows furrowing as she regarded the Denarian renegade with puzzlement.

“I could do that,” Harry said slowly, frowning as if he were thinking seriously about the question. “Or I could stay here and make sure nobody slips into the Great Hall and stabs you in the back. Besides, if I go in there, somebody might recognise me for what I am.”

Amanda nodded thoughtfully, accepting his reasons at face value, while Harry kept a straight face as he motioned for her to go and swung around as if he were on guard duty, his wand clasped tightly in his right hand while he reached into his overcoat and gripped the sword of his hilt, his shoulders back as he waited for Amanda to move.

Amanda took a deep breath, rubbing her tired grey-eyes and then slowly opened the door. An overpowering smell of hot food and warm air struck her face as she blinked, the almost blinding light from the thousands of floating candles striking her eyes. Dozens of heads turned her way, boys and girls from ages of eleven to seventeen watching with curiosity as she quickly walked up towards the head table, ducking her head as she blushed with embarrassment. Her eyes flickered forward as she saw an old and kindly looking wizard eye her approach with twinkling blue eyes, murmuring something to the ancient wizard on his left, Headmaster Smith.

Her eyes found the person she was looking for and she quickly hurried over, trying to ignore the hundreds of stares and whispers as she approached her sister, Molly, who was looking at her in a startled manner, the food on her fork totally forgotten at the sight of her younger sister.

“Hi,” Amanda said weakly, giving a small wave with her hand.

“Amanda?” Molly said in disbelief as she dropped her fork on her plate. “What are you doing here?”

“There’s been an, um, family emergency,” Amanda said quickly, glancing meaningfully at Molly as she leaned in closer, her voice lowering. “It’s about daddy’s night job. You have to come with me, right now!”

Molly paled and stood up, quickly making her way around the table towards Amanda, her eyes blazing with emotion as she grabbed her younger sister’s arm and dragged her down the Great Hall, her pace quick as she opened the doors, slipped out and closed them again with a soft click. A moment later, the murmuring and mutterings

began as students and Professors alike started chatting softly with each other. At the Head table, Albus Dumbledore frowned softly and eyed the Great Hall doors speculatively.

“Tell me what happened,” Molly demanded as soon as the doors were closed, her blue eyes sparkling with worry as she rounded on her younger sister. “Is everybody alright? Where’s Dad? How did you get here?”

Amanda shook her head silently and gestured over her sister’s shoulder. Molly frowned and turned around, her beautiful face scrunched up in confusion as Harry stepped forward, his eyes raking over the beautiful girl for a brief instant before they met her blue orbs fearlessly.

“Who is this, Amanda?” Molly asked slowly, frowning as she watched Harry closely. “What’s going on?”

“My name is Harry,” Harry introduced himself quietly, and a cocky grin washed over his face. “I’m your friendly neighbourhood hellspawn and I’m here to save your life.”

Molly didn’t move and Harry could see that behind her eyes, her mind was working furiously. Suddenly comprehension dawned on her face as she stared at Harry with a look of abject horror, her eyes glinting and suddenly Harry could feel power warping around her, a golden nimbus of untainted true-magic, so similar yet so different to his hellfire.

“You’re that boy...” hissed out Molly, anger appearing on her face as she took a step backwards, raising her hands at him. A spark of golden power flared in her hands, the light quickly growing brighter and brighter as she prepared to strike out at Harry, who had taken a step backwards, his face devoid of his cocky grin as he embraced his hellfire, a searing and cascading wave of power roaring into him.

“Wait!” Amanda shouted and darted forward, diving in between the two powerful magic-users, her hands separating them apart, and her

eyes wide with panic as she pleaded with her older sister. "Molly, he's alright! He saved me, he saved Mom!"

Molly hesitated, eyeing Harry with a dangerous look on her face as power throbbed in her hands, but her gaze flickered from Harry's blazing eyes, the dark aura around him quite noticeable for one with her talents, towards her sister, who eyed her with a pleading expression on her face, and she slowly and reluctantly let the spell die half-formed. She eyed Amanda with a severe expression on her face and narrowed her eyes.

"Tell me what happened," She ordered quietly.

Amanda opened her mouth but Harry broke in, his voice rich with both amusement and apprehension as he lowered his wand, the curling smoke rising from the engraved runes fading away as he let go of his hellfire, almost smiling at Meciél's approval over his control and discipline.

"Long story short," he said quickly. "Nicodemus; Do you know of him?"

"He's one of the Order of the Blackened Denarius," Molly answered quietly, staring at him with a hard expression on her face. "He's just like you."

"In a way, yeah," Harry said, glossing over the exact differences between Nicodemus and himself. "He has sworn to kill your family after daddy killed his daughter. I have a life-debt to said family; therefore, I have to make sure you don't die," and here he gestured at Molly, and then Amanda. "And that she doesn't die, and that you get to a safe place, so I can call off the debt."

"I see," Molly said slowly, eyeing Harry carefully

"Besides, I don't like Nicodemus, so in this case it's like sacrificing one person and getting two rewards," Harry added, almost as an afterthought, and Molly blinked at his metaphor, eyeing him with a mixture of wariness and confusion.

Harry noticed her stare and rolled his eyes in irritation, running his hand through his hair as he tapped his foot impatiently.

“We have to go,” said Harry in a clear, loud tone, as if he were speaking to a slightly deaf person. “Soon would be good, now would be better.”

“Where would you take us?” Molly asked suspiciously.

“Well, I’d take you to the church your brother and sister went to,” Harry said. “Your Mum said the priest could take them to the safe place where she was going. I figure he can do the same for you.”

“And then what?”

Harry growled in annoyance, a scowl appearing on his face.

“Then I will go, you can go and we’ll never have to see each other again!” He snapped. “Are you done with the stupid questions?”

“I can’t leave,” Molly answered abruptly, turning away and looking at her sister, who blinked in shock.

“Um....why not?” asked Harry, puzzlement on his features. “Because there are people coming to kill you. It might take them a while to get past the wards, but they’ll get in. Once Nicodemus sets his mind to something, Meciell tells me that he’ll do whatever it takes to see it through, and I get the feeling that the man really isn’t thinking rationally anymore.”

“I’m bound by magical contract,” Molly told him curtly, looking annoyed at his tone. “I had to sign it so I could supervise the tournament. I know a lot about the tournament now, I can’t leave.”

“Well, get out of it then!” Harry snapped in annoyance.

“I can’t!” Molly snapped back just as fiercely.

“What happens if you break it?” Harry asked quickly. “Is it worse than an agonising and torturous period of time under Nicodemus’ care?”

“If I break it, bad things will happen to me,” Molly said stiffly. “The whole thing seems to be somewhat based on the Old World rules. My magic might be permanently damaged.”

“You’ll get over it,” Harry said quickly.

“No I won’t,” Molly growled angrily. “And I won’t leave if my magic is threatened!”

Harry wordlessly growled back, a terrible scowl on his face as he turned away from Molly, while Amanda was watching the exchange with wide eyes, biting her lip nervously as her gaze flickered between Harry and Molly.

“Look, little girl,” Harry whispered darkly, watching Molly’s face cloud over with anger as she clenched her fists. “Daddy and his little knights of the round table aren’t here to save you, so you’ve only got me and...”

Suddenly the Great Hall doors opened and Harry’s eyes flickered over as a tall, thin elderly man with a long, white beard, twinkling blue eyes and a rather spectacular purple and green wizards hat appeared, watching the group in front of him with a pensieve frown.

“And what looks like a very ugly Merlin here to save you,” Harry continued, his eyes glittering as he glared at Molly. “What’s it going to be?”

“I won’t sacrifice my magic,” Molly growled, venom dripping off her voice as she glared at the insolent teenage boy in front of her. “Besides, I can protect myself. You’ll just have to find another way to get rid of your stupid debt!”

The blonde woman suddenly realised that somebody was standing behind her and whirled around, power quickly flaring around her body, but it died away as she realised who it was and despite herself, she managed to blush as she stammered out an apology.

“Sorry, Headmaster Dumbledore.”

Dumbledore didn't answer her as he gazed unblinkingly at Harry, who eyed the elderly man back with an expression of annoyance and perhaps a little bit of a challenge in his gaze. The man's eyebrows rose up into his hairline as he exhaled softly, sounding truly surprised.

“Harry Potter,” He murmured softly, his blue eyes staring at the boy as if he couldn't what he was seeing.

Molly frowned in puzzlement, staring at the elder man and the younger boy alternately but Amanda let out a soft gasp, her eyes widening as she pointed a shaky hand towards Harry, her face absolutely dumbstruck.

“You're the boy-who-lived?” She exclaimed loudly.

Harry didn't even answer her as he stared at Dumbledore, a speculative smile coming over his face as he pondered something. Within his mind, Meciell sent a pulse of approval at his plan and he plastered a small, secretive smile on his face.

“Well, if you can't leave,” He muttered, before he raised his voice and directed it at the elderly man in front of him. “Say Headmaster, can I become a student here?”

Dumbledore blinked, his blue eyes starting to twinkle brightly as a smile spread over his face, his gnarled hands rubbing together in thought, while both Amanda and Molly gaped at him in surprise, shock on their faces.

“We need to talk in any case,” Harry said and his eyes flickered to the partially open Great Hall doors. “Somewhere private.”

“Very well,” Dumbledore said softly, smoothing his long beard with one hand as his eyes ran over Harry, Amanda and Molly with barely hidden curiosity. “Shall we take this to my office? I presume that both Professor Carpenter and Miss Carpenter here are essential to your story?”

Harry nodded and took a step backwards, giving a short, mock-bow of his head as he gestured with his hand.

“Lead the way.”

Harry blinked as he climbed the last of the stairs to the Headmaster’s office, staring at the small, silvery trinkets and devices on the shelves, especially the few that moved in strange and odd patterns. His eyes took in the bookshelf of faded, aged texts, an empty bird stand in the corner and a thick, luxurious mahogany desk. The man, Dumbledore, stepped past him, walking briskly as he strode around the desk and eased himself into the armchair behind it, a twinkle in his eye as he regarded his guests.

“Please,” He said pleasantly. “Have a seat.”

Harry frowned, and then tensed as the man casually pulled out his wand from long, blue robe and gave it a graceful swish. From out of nowhere appeared three, comfortable-looking recliners and Amanda, Harry and Molly looked suitably impressed as they slowly sat down.

‘This man has great power and skill,’ Meciél whispered into his mind. ‘Be very wary of him.’

“Let me start by saying that it is good to see you alive,” Dumbledore said, fixing his periwinkle gaze on Harry, who kept a blank face as he stared at the man. “We were all very worried when the house burned down.”

“I survived,” Harry said flatly. He didn’t like talking about that day to anybody, not even Meciél, because the things he had done remained branded into his mind courtesy of the Third Sight, the terror, hatred

and sheer violence of what he had done still making him a little queasy, even to this day.

“Alas, your family did not,” Dumbledore said softly, looking very sympathetic. “I am deeply sorry for the loss of your Aunt, Uncle and cousin. I’m sure you must miss them very much.”

“No, not really,” scoffed Harry, shrugging his shoulders and looking decidedly unconcerned as Dumbledore’s eyes flashed with something like shock. “I didn’t care about them. Besides, I have a new family now.”

“Indeed?” Dumbledore said lightly, but his eyes had narrowed ever so slightly as he gazed at Harry, while Amanda shifted in her seat, remembering what Harry had told her about his family long ago. Molly remained silent, watching the conversation between the two with narrowed eyes, absorbing every word that was said.

“All of our attempts to find you over the years have failed,” Dumbledore continued and true curiosity and puzzlement flickered over his face. “From what I could gather, it seemed as if you were being protected by something ancient and undoubtedly powerful, blocking our every attempt to find you.”

“Oh, she’s all that and much more,” Harry murmured secretively, something akin to affection appearing on his face, and Dumbledore noted the emotion carefully as he continued.

“Would you care to elaborate on that?” He asked evenly, his crystal blue eyes noting Harry’s every emotion and stance, but the boy was already shaking his head, an unconcerned and lazy smile on his face.

“Nope,” Harry responded cheerfully, slightly shaking his head.

“Well then, may I ask what brings you to Hogwarts?” Dumbledore questioned, not deterred by Harry’s short reply. The teenage boy didn’t say a word but merely gestured at the two girls on his right. Dumbledore turned his head, eying them with a questioning look in his eyes and Amanda spoke up, her voice quiet and nervous.

“Somebody is trying to kill us and our entire family,” She answered quietly. “Harry wants to stop it.”

“I see,” Dumbledore murmured, leaning back in his chair as he stroked his beard. His demeanour didn’t change for an instant, but Harry could have sworn he saw a flicker of something hard in the man’s eyes. “May I ask who would do such a thing?”

“An evil man,” Amanda answered hesitantly, her gaze flickering to both Harry and Molly for support.

“I’m here because I just want to pay off my life-debt,” Harry broke in loudly, casting a defiant gaze at Molly from the corner of his eye. “But somebody is refusing to let me save their life.”

“I can’t leave Hogwarts, Headmaster Dumbledore,” Molly said, her voice tight with anger as she threw a glare at Harry. “I’ve signed the tournament contract, to allow me to stand in Headmaster Smith’s place. If I back out...” She trailed off, but Dumbledore understood as he nodded sagely.

“Molly can’t leave because of that contract,” Harry said in annoyance. “So I want to stay close to her and fulfil my debt. Her family is at a safe location at the moment, so Amanda can leave and stay with them, while I...”

“No, I’m staying,” Amanda interrupted quickly. Harry rolled his eyes and shot her an annoyed scowl, but although she bit her lip nervously under his gaze and looked away, she didn’t budge down and folded her arms across her chest stubbornly. “I’m not missing out on a year of school.”

“I can make the arrangements if you wish to stay here,” Dumbledore said quietly, interrupting Harry before he could snarl a response at Amanda. “You will be protected here. However, I must know how dangerous the threat to your life is and I must know the identity of this evil man.”

“His name is Nicodemus,” Harry answered, almost in a bored tone. “Have you heard of him?”

“I have not.”

“Well, he’s powerful,” Harry said grudgingly, frowning as his eyes seemed to stare off into the distance. “Very powerful. He has a number of extremely potent magical weapons and abilities at his disposal, as well as assassins that he can send.”

“Assassins?” Dumbledore said, frowning as he pressed the tips of his fingers together in contemplation. “Do you know what kind of assassins he has?”

“Well, he sent some armed men for Charity, that’s Amanda’s mum, and the rest of the family,” Harry answered honestly, giving a little shrug. “They were all armed with some pretty heavy guns, but they didn’t have any magic in them. Apart from that, I have no idea what he has.”

“Wait,” Molly broke in, her face paling and shocked as she stared at Harry with wide eyes. “Mom was attacked?”

“I managed to get there in the nick of time,” answered Harry, a touch of cockiness as he smiled at Molly. “I saved your mother’s life and stopped the assassins from attacking her again.”

“You stopped the assassins?” Dumbledore asked in a mild voice, but Harry thought that he was peering at him even more closely than he had been before. “How did you do that?”

Harry didn’t say anything but the vicious smile that curved his lips was answer enough and Dumbledore exhaled noisily, sinking into his chair, although his face remained as emotionless as it had before. He stepped his fingers together and eyed Harry and Amanda carefully as he considered his options.

“I cannot reject a child who is seeking refuge,” He said at last, and Amanda beamed at him. This brought a small twinkle to

Dumbledore's eye. "Let me see. You have come here because of...personal family reasons, yes, which is essentially true. You have also come here to support your older sister and your school."

"Good idea, Headmaster," Molly praised, giving her younger sister a fond look.

"Idiot," Harry muttered but when Amanda looked his way, he had already redirected his gaze at Dumbledore.

"I'd like to join up, just for the year," Harry remarked, meeting the older wizard's gaze evenly. The blue eyes twinkled, but it was a dim look as the man stared gravely at him.

"Of course you can join, Harry," Dumbledore murmured. "Your name has been in the books ever since you were born. However, you do realise that I have a great many questions for you. Still, let us put that aside for now and sort you into the school houses."

Harry watched as the aged wizard gave a short flick with his wand, noting the movements of the summoning charm, and a ratty, dirty wizard's hat soared off its shelf and into the man's hand. He stood up, his eyes twinkling at Amanda's look of confusion and Harry's look of disgust as he walked over and placed the hat on Amanda's blonde head.

Harry eyed the debacle with grudging curiosity and almost jumped out of his seat when the hat suddenly moved, its dirty folds moving as if they were lips, and it shouted out something in a loud, clear and male voice.

"GRYFFINDOR!"

Dumbledore took the hat from Amanda, who eyed the piece of ragged cloth in amazement.

"It talks," She breathed softly, her eyes wide.

“It does indeed,” Dumbledore said warmly as he moved across the room, his long legs covering the distance in several paces. “I believe it is your turn, Mr Potter?”

Harry hesitated, eying the strange hat carefully, but he allowed the silver-haired wizard to place it on his head. The hat much was too big and almost fell over his eyes as Harry sat there, a puzzled frown on his face as nothing happened. Suddenly, he felt something slide into his mind, bypassing his natural mental defences and his eyes widened, his throat choking out a strangled yell. But Meciél came to the rescue and hellfire blazed in his mind, searing power flowing into Harry as Meciél threw her might against the invader, her fiery presence rushing forward, almost overwhelming Harry’s mind with her sheer force.

‘BEGONE FROM THIS PLACE!’ She screamed and Harry shivered in fright at the sound of her voice, majestic and terrifying all at once, rent with vicious hatred and rage. ‘GET OUT! NOW!’

To the others in the room, it seemed as if the hat gave a twitch of pain on Harry’s head, before it opened its rim and let out a loud, agonising scream as the same force that threw it from Harry’s mind hurled it across the room. It landed in a crumpled heap, shivering and twitching under the astonished gazes of the others as Harry jumped to his feet, hellfire burning within him as he glared at it hatred.

“Demon!” The hat croaked out weakly, as if it had been hurt when Meciél had expelled it. Still, its voice was loud and clear as it continued, almost babbling with fear. “Exiled one! Accursed host! Unholy beast! I shall not sort thee! I banish thee to the furthest reaches of hell! Depart from here and never return!”

Dumbledore silenced it with a flick of his wand and under the watchful glances of the moving portraits on the walls, he turned to Harry with an expression of something akin to alarm on his face, his wand remaining clasped in his hand.

“What are you, Harry Potter?” He asked quietly, his words echoing through his silent office.

“He’s a member of the Order of Blackened Denarius,” Molly answered, watching Harry carefully with narrowed eyes, her fingers unconsciously flexing in and out.

Harry shook off the shock of the past happenings and regained his poise, a small smile coming over his face as he sat back down in the comfortable chair, watching Dumbledore frown and stride to one of the bookshelves. The Headmaster withdrew a small tome under Harry, Amanda and Molly’s watchful gaze and flicked it open. Pages rustled against each other as Dumbledore scanned the index and flipped to the right chapter. As soon as he read the first sentence, his face pale and he suddenly seemed to age a hundred years, his eyes losing any twinkle of sparkle as he turned to Harry.

“Oh Harry, what have you done to yourself?” He murmured with shock and a deep, unmovable sadness, his blue eyes scanning Harry closely, as if he were searching for any trace of the Fallen within him.

“Shut up,” Harry snarled and Dumbledore blinked at his vehemence. “Don’t give me that fucking look of pity! I’m happy with what I am, I’m comfortable where I live and I have a woman that cares for me more than anybody else in this world has.”

Dumbledore stared at him, his face suddenly wary and his stance changing in subtle ways, as if he were readying himself to either attack – or defend himself against – Harry. Harry, however, made no aggressive moves as he leaned back in his chair, watching Dumbledore intently.

“Now what?” He asked roughly. “Am I still allowed to become a student, or should I say goodbye to Amanda and Molly here and wish them the very best in the afterlife.”

“Mr Potter. How could I, in good conscience, allow you to join the student body here,” Dumbledore breathed out softly. “You, being what you are, could do a considerable amount of harm to the students, physically, emotionally and morally.”

Harry leaned forward, his eyes intent and serious.

“I promise you, thrice bound, that I am not here to harm you or your students physically, emotionally and morally,” He said quietly and seriously, gesturing at Molly and Amanda, who watched the proceedings silently. “I only want to make sure that they don’t die.”

Dumbledore stared at him for a second and then, strangely, relaxed, as if understood the seriousness and solemnness of a thrice-bound promise coming from a being of the Old World. The old wizard walked over to his chair again and sunk in, his face pensieve as he regarded Harry thoughtfully. After a minute or two of deliberation, Dumbledore exhaled softly and leaned forward, his eye regaining a small twinkle.

“Very well, Harry,” He murmured softly. “Since the hat is unable to sort you, we shall place you in Gryffindor. It was the house that your parents occupied in their school days.”

“Cool,” Harry said flatly and stood up, rubbing a crick in his neck. “Now, I’m tired from running around the world all day and trying to keep this lot alive. Where can I sleep?”

“For now, I will find you both individual quarters, as to not startle your housemates with your unexpected arrival,” Dumbledore answered and snapped his fingers.

There was a small crack as a small, green and decidedly ugly creature appeared in the room, wearing a faded by well-looked after pillowcase around his chest. Harry blinked in shock, eying the creature in front of him carefully, but he just shook his head in resignation as Dumbledore spoke up.

“Liffy, please take these two new students to the spare rooms on the third floor.”

“Yes master,” The small creature squeaked and turned to Harry and Amanda, it’s bulbous eyes lowered submissively. “This way, young masters.”

Harry exchanged a look with Amanda as the two of them followed the small creature out of the Headmaster's office and down the stairs. Back in the office, Molly moved to go but Dumbledore halted her as he spoke up, his voice weary and suddenly sounding very old.

“Not just yet, Professor Carpenter. May we speak?”

Molly frowned but sat back down as Dumbledore rubbed his somnolent eyes, suddenly looking very old and tired as he gazed at the woman in front of him, his expression serious and foreboding as he straightened in his chair, pushing the half-moon glasses up his crooked nose.

“I need you to tell me everything you know about the Order of Blackened Denarius and what you know of Harry Potter.”

Molly nodded and began talking and as she did so, Albus Dumbledore's face shrunk in on itself as the horror of the knowledge he had acquired worsened. What had Harry Potter become, and what could he do about it?

Headmaster Albus Dumbledore eyed the students seated in the Great Hall in front of him and stood up, his blue eyes twinkling as he loudly tapped his spoon on the side of his cup of tea. A loud clanging noise, magnified by a nifty piece of magic, echoed in the large room and students turned their heads and fell silent, Hogwarts, Beauxbatons, Durmstrang and Salem alike.

“Good morning,” Albus greeted pleasantly. “Let me first welcome our international friends to their first day at our fine castle. It is a pleasure to have you here and I hope that our schools can set aside old differences and become firm friends.”

There was a polite round of applause as Dumbledore smiled warmly, his aged face showing nothing of the troublesome night he had had after spending several hours researching about the Order of Blackened Denarius and the Fallen.

“Because of the overwhelming generosity of Headmaster Smith and Professor Carpenter of Salem’s Witches and Wizards Institute, I am delighted to announce that a new, entirely voluntary class will be held once a week, starting from tomorrow night. The course offers a brief glance at Alternative Magics and investigates the creatures and customs that make up the Old World. I strongly urge everybody who is interested in such a course to attend. I guarantee you that it will be well worth your time.”

Here he paused; slowly stroking his beard as some of the students muttered to each other in surprise, but he raised his hands and the hall instantly went silent

“I am delighted to say that this year; we are graced with two new students, who only arrived here at Hogwarts last night. They have already been sorted into their houses, so without further ado, please welcome our new latecomers, Amanda Carpenter, the younger sister of Professor Carpenter, who was sorted into Gryffindor fourth year, and Harry Potter, who was also sorted in Gryffindor fourth year.”

The entire Hall burst into loud chatters and exclaimed gasps and a hundreds of students turned their heads towards the doors as a single figure slipped in, a scowl on his face.

Harry eyed the Great Hall, noting that everybody seemed to be looking at him with a mixture of surprise, shock and awe. His scowl deepened as he heard the soft murmur of whispers increase as he walked forward, eyeing all of the tables and frowning. He glanced down at his robes, shifting uncomfortably in the unfamiliar clothing, and noted the red and gold tie. His eyes swung up to the large, colourful banners and immediately spotted the colours he was looking for.

He walked over to the nearest empty seat, his face set in a scowl as he jabbed a finger towards the nearest person, a lanky, redheaded boy with a gaping face and wide eyes.

“Gryffindor, right?” He asked.

“Um...Y-yeah,” The boy stuttered in surprise, his ears flaming with blood as he gaped at him, his eyes wide with shock and awe.

Harry ignored him and sat down, face still twisted into a scowl as he grabbed some food from the massive platters in front of him and splattered them on his plate, his stomach rumbling hungrily. He shifted uncomfortably in his new robes, eyeing them with a look of disgust. They were too small to hide his sword, so he had been forced to leave the powerful weapon in his room. He turned to his food with a ravenous expression on and dipped his food into it, preparing to take a bite.

“ So, you’re the boy-who-lived?” asked the redhead boy, his companions, a bushy-haired girl and a chubby, mousy-haired boy looking on with curiosity.

Harry let out a sigh as he dropped the fork from his mouth, nodding as he glanced around the hall, seeing that most of the students were still darting glances his way while some of the older ones were

whispering to the younger ones, gesturing to Harry with quick, excited motions.

“Can you show me your scar?” The boy asked again, his eyes fixating on Harry’s fringe which covered his forehead.

Harry dropped his fork, which landed on the plate with a loud clang as he stared at the boy with an expression of annoyance and disdain. The redheaded boy blushed, his face turning bright red as he nervously looked away. Harry scowled and concentrated on his food again, picking up his fork and preparing to eat.

“Aren’t you dead?” The other boy, with the mousy brown hair and chubby face, asked nervously.

Harry let out an exasperated sigh as he dropped his fork and looked up, his eyes glinting with irritation as he rounded on the boy with a nasty tone.

“Do I look dead to you?” Harry snapped out, the boy flinching at every word. “But, hey, if you guys don’t let me finish my breakfast, I just might die of starvation and you can really see what a dead Harry Potter looks like.”

The boy looked away; flinching at Harry’s sharp gaze, but the green-eyed boy looked away and turned back to his food. He picked up his fork again but didn’t even put it to his lips as he waited for one of the idiots to say something else, and sure enough:

“Well, there’s no need to be rude,” the frizzy-haired girl huffed, her chocolate-coloured eyes eying Harry with disapproval. “We were just curious.”

“There are plenty of reasons to be rude,” Harry snapped, eying her with an irritated scowl on his face. “For example, you people won’t shut the hell up and let me eat.”

The girl gaped at his hostile tone, blinking in shock as Harry went back to his food, and a scowl appeared on her face. She opened her mouth, her body bristling with righteous anger, when Amanda slid in next to Harry, flashing a bright smile at the group in front of Harry.

“Don’t mind him,” She said cheerfully. “He’s a grumpy kid.”

Harry stared at her with an incredulous expression on his face.

“Why the hell are you sitting next to me?” He asked, almost looking bewildered as he leaned in, his voice lowering. “I can protect you if sit at the other end of the table, you know.”

“Oh, Harry,” Amanda said in disappointment, wagging her finger at him. “That’s not a very nice way to talk your friend.”

“Oh shut up,” Harry muttered angrily as he turned away, while Amanda flashed another smile, winking at the group of Gryffindor in front of her, who smiled back at the pleasant girl.

“You’re not a morning person, are you?” The bushy-haired girl said, her face twisted in a disapproving and stern frown.

“Sometimes I am,” Harry said, lifting his eyes and sending a very annoyed look her way. “But not when I have to come down into a hall full of chattering idiots.”

“Idiots!” The girl huffed out, almost in shock as she gazed at the boys around her for support, but they merely shrugged helplessly. “What did I ever do...?”

“Shut up,” Harry interrupted, placing his eyes back down on his plate as he picked up his fork.

“But...” The girl started, glaring at him with anger.

“Shut up,” Harry repeated again, twirling his fork in his food.

“Harry...” Amanda started, eying the girl with an apologetic look on her face as she nudged him, her eyes glancing at him meaningfully.

“Shut,” Harry said and raised his gaze to look at the blonde. “Up.”

Amanda sighed, her light-grey eyes meeting Harry’s green orbs for a brief second, before she turned away with a small, shiver up spine at the darkness she could see in them. Harry let a small, smirk curve his lips as he turned back to his food, lifting his fork and finally taking the first bite out of his breakfast.

“Anyway,” Amanda started, shooting Harry an annoyed look before replacing it with a bright smile as she beamed at the group across the table. “I’m Amanda Carpenter.”

“I’m Hermione,” The frizzy-hair girl said after a moment’s hesitation, gesturing at the redheaded boy and the mousy-brown haired boy respectively as she continued. “This is Ron and Neville. We’re fourth years, just like you.”

Harry ignored the rest of the conversation as Amanda, Hermione, Ron, and occasionally Neville began loudly chatting to each other as he dug into his breakfast, almost grunting with satisfaction as he swallowed a fatty, piece of sausage. He enjoyed his breakfast in relative silence, ignoring the constant stares and mutters from the people around the Great Hall, until there was a coughing sound behind him and he turned around, a frown already on his face.

A tall, thin and aging witch stood behind him, her greying dark hair tied back into a bun as she stared down at Harry, her stern face eying him carefully as she handed him a small piece of parchment. Harry took it and glanced down at it, noting that it was a timetable of sorts as the Professor passed another one to Amanda, who took it with a reflexive thank you.

“Mr Potter, Ms Carpenter, I am Professor McGonagall, Head of Gryffindor house,” The woman began severely. “Ms Carpenter, I understand that you have had three years of formal education at Salem’s Witches and Wizards Institute. Am I correct?”

“Yes, Professor,” Amanda replied obediently.

McGonagall nodded and swung her gaze to Harry.

“Mr Potter, have you ever had any magical education before?” She asked.

Harry hesitated and nodded his head slowly.

“I have had a tutor for the past seven years,” He answered slowly. “But I don’t know if what she taught me would fit into your curriculum, and there were some subjects she didn’t have any expertise in at all.”

McGonagall frowned but didn’t appear to be too surprised.

“I thought that it might have been something like that,” She said crisply. “So it has been decided that you will complete a series of past examinations, to assess your knowledge. If you find yourself lacking in certain areas, tutors and additional study time will be made available to you. Is that acceptable, Mr Potter?”

“Sure,” Harry shrugged easily.

McGonagall’s lips thinned, probably at Harry’s seemingly uncaring manner.

“Good. Now, you both have to choose two electives in addition to your core subjects,” McGonagall continued, handing both Harry and Amanda another piece of parchment. Harry frowned as he looked down, reading the electives, which were Care of Magical Creatures, Muggle Studies, Ancient Runes, Arithmancy and Divination.

‘Do not bother with Ancient Runes,’ Meciell said softly into his mind. ‘Historical information is my specialty, after all. I suggest that you try Divination. The ability to see into the future could be a very valuable asset.’

“I’ll take Divination,” Harry told McGonagall and frowned at the rest of the list, thinking carefully about what subject to take. Muggle Studies wouldn’t be any fun, since he already knew it, and Arithmancy sounded like it had something to do with numbers and Harry had always hated maths. “And Care of Magical Creatures.”

“Very well, Mr Potter,” McGonagall said and she gestured for Harry to hand back his timetable. He did, and watched as she tapped it sharply with her wand, before handing it back. When he looked down, he saw that some of his free slots had been filled up with new classes. “Ms Carpenter?”

Amanda hesitated as she saw Harry’s rather pointed expression and she sighed, handing back her timetable to McGonagall.

“I’ll do the same as what he’s doing,” She muttered.

McGonagall’s brows raised but she nodded, doing the same thing with Amanda’s timetable as she had done with Harry’s and handing it back.

“You will both be attending your classes today,” She instructed them. “You will receive your books at a later date but for now, I urge you to pay attention to what is being taught. Fourth Year can be a very difficult year for some students.” Here she paused and a smile curved her lips, a seemingly rare expression for the stern woman. “Welcome back, Mr Potter. I do hope you behave a little better than your father did.”

She spun around and walked away from the table as Harry grunted, turning back to his breakfast and picking up his fork again as he started eating. Next to him, Amanda frowned as she looked at her timetable and glanced over at his.

“Hey, have a class this morning,” She said with surprise. “Potions, with Professor Snape, in the dungeons. Ooh, I’ve heard of him. He’s meant to be really good.”

“Whoop-dee-doo,” Harry muttered.

The Potions classroom within the Hogwarts dungeons was dark and damp, reeking of a variety of different and unknown smells. The only sounds Harry could hear as he walked in were the quiet, hushed whispers from the students already sitting at their desks and the soft, crackle of the flames underneath the small, pewter cauldrons.

Harry ignored the stares as he scanned the room and his eyes fell on an empty seat. He walked over and sat down next to a whitish-blondish haired boy, who eyed him speculatively. A few moments later, Amanda walked into the classroom and made her way over the Harry, sitting in the extra seat next to him and placing her wand on the table in front of her. She glanced around the dungeon with a look of interest and then noticed Harry's look of irritation.

"Hmm?" She murmured. "Is something wrong?"

"It's nothing," Harry muttered and looked away. Meanwhile, the boy on his right continued to gaze at him curiously, and then reached over and extended his hand. He was a short boy, with pale hair, pale skin and pale eyes. He had the look of the aristocrats of old, not only in physical features but in facial expressions as well as he haughtily stared at Harry.

"You must be Harry Potter," He said loudly. "The name's Malfoy, Draco Malfoy."

"Do I look like I care?" responded Harry, his voice bored and lacking interest. As the blonde boy blinked in surprise, anger tracing up his face, Meciél spoke up within his mind.

'Now, beloved, you will be here for some time, so it wouldn't hurt to play nice for a change.'

Harry sighed and made a small face at Meciél, but he grudgingly extended his hand.

"Sorry," he muttered insincerely. "Bad morning."

Malfoy frowned but clasped Harry's hand and shook it. Harry almost shuddered at the greasy, clammy feel of Malfoy's palm and quickly let go, discreetly bringing it under his desk and wiping it on his robes. Amanda noticed the exchange reached over, a perky smile on her face as she extended her small hand.

"Hi," She said brightly. "I'm Amanda Carpenter."

Harry eyed her as if she was an idiot, leaning forward with an annoyed scowl on his face as he put his lips to her ear.

"Never give your full name to somebody," He hissed softly. "Ever!"

Amanda blinked, turning her head and staring at him with puzzlement, while Malfoy stared at her hand, not taking it as he eyed Amanda carefully.

"I've never heard of the Carpenter family before," He said slowly. "Are you a pureblood family in America?"

"What?" Amanda blinked, before smiling in comprehension. "No, no, my parents can't use magic. My older sister can, though."

"You're a mud...muggleborn?" Malfoy spat out, his face twisting with disgust and he withdrew his hand.

Amanda flinched at his tone and snapped her hand back, scowling at him angrily

"What if I am?" She challenged.

Malfoy didn't say anything to her and glanced back to Harry, smiling as if they were conspirators in a secret plot.

"You'll find out that some wizarding families are superior to others," He said softly, leaning forward to stare at Harry intently. "I can help you, if you'd like."

“Yeah, I’m going to have to tell you to go fuck yourself,” Harry replied nonchalantly and a small smirk curved his lips as Malfoy blinked in shock, flinching as if he had been stung as colour shot up his pale cheeks.

The class quietened around them as they waited for Malfoy to make the next move. The blonde boy’s eyes glinted with anger as he leaned forward, but it was at that moment that the door to the classroom slammed open and a tall, lanky with sallow skin and long, greasy hair stormed in, his face set into a perpetual scowl.

Malfoy hastily leaned back as Amanda sent a small smile in Harry’s direction, but Harry ignored her and watched as the man came to front of classroom, his cloak whipping behind him as he whirled around to address the students.

“We will be continuing on our Cheering solutions,’ The Professor said in a cold, silky voice, which echoed around the quiet dungeon and giving it a certain nastiness to it. “For the incompetent students here, please pay attention.”

Harry saw that his eyes flickered over on the other side of the room, focussing on Ron and Neville, both who shied away nervously from the gaze as the man smirked in amusement and continued.

“You must add the hippogriff feather after the bat’s blood or you will melt your cauldron...again,” The Professor said, and this time he made no attempt at being subtle as he glanced at Neville with a look of disdain on his face. “Let’s see if we can have a lesson where Longbottom doesn’t ruin a perfectly good set of ingredients. You may begin.”

Neville’s face burned red as he slumped into his seat and Ron muttered something to him, his voice too low for Harry to hear as the class got started in their work, pulling ingredients out from small pouches and starting to dice them up. Harry and Amanda exchanged a glance, Harry looking bored and Amanda looking confused as she raised her hand.

“Um...Professor?” She called out, gaining the attention of the entire class. “We’re new here so we haven’t started the potion yet.”

“Ah, yes,” The Professor murmured softly, his glittering, obsidian eyes staring at Harry and Amanda intently. “It’s the transfer student and of course, our new celebrity guest, Mr Potter. I see you have finally decided to grace Hogwarts with your presence.”

Harry blinked in surprise at the hostility and dislike he could hear in the man’s sneering tone and raised his eyes, a scowl appearing on his face as he assessed the Professor in front of him. The man seemed to notice the action and a slow, malicious smirk spread across his face.

“Class, stop your work,” He ordered suddenly and rounded on Harry, his eyes glittering with emotion. “We’re going to see just what Potter has learnt in his absence here. Tell me, where could I find boomslang skin?”

‘I cannot assist you here, beloved. My knowledge does not extend to the craft that these wand-wizards call potion-making.’

“Well,” Harry replied, frowning in mock-thought. “You could probably peel some off a boomslang, I guess.”

“Tut, tut, tut,” The professor tittered slowly. “Your answer is incorrect. Let’s try again, shall we? Tell me Potter, what is important about the fourth use of dragon’s blood in potion-making?”

“The fourth use,” Harry repeated softly. “Well, I’d say it’s a little more important than the fifth use, but c’mon, there’s no way it can compare to the third use.”

“Five points from Gryffindor for your cheek, Potter,” The professor snapped, irritation glittering in his eyes as he stared at Harry with disdain. “I can clearly see that life has not seen fit to indulge you with a brain, but that’s the pity about celebrities these days, isn’t it?”

Harry stared at the man quietly, anger boiling in his stomach over his treatment. Next to him, Amanda seemed to be stunned into stillness, her eyes wide as she picked up on the amount of hatred that the professor had for Harry. But Harry had had enough, and in his mind Meciél quite agreed with him, so he firmed his resolve and let an arrogant and haughty smile come over his face.

“Oh, Professor?” He called out innocently. “What was your name again?”

“My name is Severus Snape,” The professor answered curtly. “You may call me Professor Snape, and that will be two points off for interrupting me.”

There were mutters of protest from around the room but Snape swivelled his head, his eyes narrowed, and they instantly disappeared. It seemed as if Snape’s attitude wasn’t just solely directed at him, but unlike the rest of these people, he wasn’t going to take it lying down.

“Ah, now Severus,” Harry began, ignoring the way Snape’s eye twitched as he said his name. “I know that you must be in awe of me but I’m going to have to insist that you stop calling me a celebrity.”

A wicked smile came over Harry’s face as he leaned forward, bringing his amused and arrogant face closer to Snape.

“Because I think that the proper term would be hero,” Harry said smugly and leant back, smoothing a hand through his hair. “I’m Harry Potter, the hero, not the celebrity.”

“Hero?” Snape repeated softly and dangerously. The dungeon completely quiet as the students watched Harry with wide eyes as if they were amazed at his audacity. “Is that how you see yourself then, Potter?”

“Well, I am a hero, aren’t I?” Harry answered conceitedly, a wicked smile curving his lips as he leant back in his chair. “I mean, I did defeat the evil Voldemort.”

The entire class flinched at the sound of the name, including Snape, who let out a small growl of anger as rage filled his features.

“Do not utter that name again!” He hissed angrily, but Harry ignored him and continued, his small, arrogant smile still on his face and infuriating Snape far more than Harry could have known.

“Severus, please try to control your jealousy. I know that you’re comparing my obviously heroic and amazing attributes to your own and find yourself lacking but don’t worry,” Harry said in a soothing tone, his face morphing into concern as he stared at the Professor gently. “I worked hard to get where I am. I’m sure you can reach my level someday.”

Snape’s sallow face was throbbing with red, his veins bulging from his neck as he glared at Harry with nothing less than pure hatred, his fingers flexing as if there was nothing else he would like more than to wrap them around Harry’s neck and squeeze.

“You arrogant little fool,” he hissed softly, menacingly. “That’s fifty points for your cheek and another fifty for the improper use of my first name! Do not delude yourself with notions of grandeur and heroism! You are nothing but an insignificant speck!

Harry sighed sadly, shaking his head remorsefully as he glanced at Amanda from the corner of his eye, who seemed to be caught between horror and laughter as she stared back, trying to keep the smile twitching her lips from appearing on her face.

“It’s sad how petty a jealous man can become,” He told her loudly, making a tsking sound. “You know, envy is a sin.”

Amanda couldn’t help it and let out a little giggle, clapping her hands over her mouth at the irony of the statement as Harry turned his head and stared back at Snape, who looked too furious for words. Harry’s smug green eyes clashed with Snape’s furious obsidian black eyes

and suddenly Meciél started as Harry felt something slide against his mind, almost like a tickling sensation.

‘He is probing your mind!’ She hissed softly.

Harry almost flinched as Meciél lashed out with her power, searing heat and power cascades through his body as sulphur filled his nostrils. The Fallens majestic and terrifying voice, rent with vicious hatred and rage, lashed out with a wordless snarl of anger, her presence dwarfing Harry’s mind as it hurled away a small, unknown presence with great fury.

Harry gave a small grunt as he refocussed his eyes, Meciél retreating back into his mind with an air of satisfaction. He looked up just as Snape let out a terrible cry of pain as both his mind and body were slapped aside by Meciél’s might, and he went crashing through this desk, knocking over stacks of parchment and shattering small bottles and vials. He landed on the ground in front of an astonished and unmoving class, who were staring at Harry with nothing less than fear and disbelief in their eyes, while Harry stood up and watched as Snape struggled up to his hands and knees, taking deep, gasping breaths.

“Now, there’s no need to get on all fours to worship me,” Harry said quietly, his pseudo-gentleness replaced with a dark smile, while the rest of the class watched as if they were spellbound. “I do accept genuflecting.”

Snape didn’t say anything as the continued to gasp for breath but the look he shot at Harry promised pain and death as the professor tried to recover from the mental backlash, his mind almost numb with pain.

“Perhaps I’ll come back when you’ve had time to adjust to my magnificent presence,” Harry said thoughtfully and motioned for Amanda to follow him. “Come on Amanda, let’s give Severus his space.”

Amanda hesitated, looking at Harry with wariness on her face, but the hard look in Harry’s eye made her gulp and she quickly stood up and

followed him from the door as the two of them left the potions classroom. As soon as Harry and Amanda were walking away, a burst of concerned chatter drifted to their ears and Harry gave a small, victorious grin.

After a few minutes of walking, Harry and Amanda had almost left the dungeons. Harry was content with the silence but Amanda seemed to be fidgeting on her feet before she let out a frustrated sigh and turned to Harry

“What did you do to him?” She demanded angrily.

“He tried to invade my mind,” Harry shrugged carelessly, and a mean smile curved his lips. “Meciel doesn’t take too kindly to that.”

Amanda shivered, not feeling cold at all as she stared at Harry for a few more moments. The two of them kept walking and as they turned a corner, they almost bumped into Dumbledore, who was conversing to one of the portraits in a low, muttered voice.

“Ah, headmaster,” Harry greeted loudly, and Dumbledore glanced up, a pleasant smile coming over his face as he approached the two students. “This is good timing.”

“What can I do for you, Mr Potter?” Dumbledore asked, stroking a hand through his beard as his bright blue eyes twinkled down at them.

“Well, these is one thing,” Harry said and his face hardened, something ugly flickering behind his icy green eyes. “You can tell that pathetic bastard of a potions professor that the next time he tries to invade my mind again, I’ll make sure she doesn’t let go.”

Dumbledore blinked as Harry stalked off, dragging Amanda by the arm after him, and his gaze flickered down into the dungeon where Harry and Amanda had just come from.

“Oh dear,” the old wizard murmured, his eyes losing their twinkle, and he set off in a fast pace to the potions classroom.

Several hours later, Harry stalked into the great hall, an expression of disinterest on his face as he made his way to the Gryffindor table. Amanda trailed after him, her face bored as the two of them sat down at the table, ignoring the stares and mutters from the other students all throughout the hall. The Beauxbatons and Durmstrang students seemed to be clueless as their neighbouring Hogwarts students filled them in on what had happened in Harry's potion lesson, although from what the young Denarian picked up, some of the rumours had been slightly embellished to include scenes including but not limited to Harry blasting Snape off his feet with a curse, the two of them having a punch-on and Harry throwing a vial of never-end acid at Snape, which was why the greasy-haired man wasn't present at the Head table.

"You have balls, mate," One of the fourth year Gryffindors said in a thick Irish accent, staring at Harry in admiration, before he turned away and started chatting with the dark-skinned boy next to him. Meanwhile, Ron, Neville and Hermione, all who were sitting in front of Harry, eyed the green-eyed boy with a variety of expressions, from awe, disapproval and speculation.

"I've never seen Snape that angry before," Ron said quietly, almost dumbstruck as he regarded Harry. "Not even after my brothers pranked him. When he got up, I thought he was going to come after you and kill you, he looked that angry, but Dumbledore came in and dismissed us early."

"I hope you're pleased with yourself," The bushy-haired girl said in disapproval, staring at Harry flatly, clearly not impressed like her housemates were. "You insulted a professor! Right in front of him! And you lost us over one-hundred points! I hope you're happy!"

Harry looked up, a mock-frown of thought on his face as he nodded slowly.

"Yeah," He said thoughtfully. "I'm happy with the way things turned out."

Hermione quivered, her lips parting as anger steamed onto her face. Amanda, seeing Hermione's hands balling up into little fists, shaking with repressed anger, quickly broke in, her voice bright and cheery as she turned to Neville.

"So, what's it like here at Hogwarts?" She asked nicely, not noticing as the brown-haired boy flushed as he looked at her, his eyes darting away nervously. "It looks like an exciting place. Some exciting stuff must have happened here."

"Oh, you won't believe some of the stuff that has happened here," Ron broke in quickly, looking pleased as Amanda turned his way, her face open and curious.

"Like what?" The blonde-haired girl asked.

Ron, Hermione and Neville exchanged secretive glances, Hermione's face etched with a silent warning, but Ron ignored her as he turned back to Amanda, leaning in as he lowered his voice. Next to Amanda, Harry listened in, curious despite himself as he munched on his food.

"Well, in our first year there was something really secret hidden here at Hogwarts," Ron breathed quietly. "Have you ever heard of the Philosophers stone?"

"No, I haven't," Amanda said slowly.

'It is a powerful wand-wizard artefact,' Meciell said into Harry's mind as he listened in. 'And it is capable of granting both immortality against age and an unlimited supply of gold to any person who uses it.'

'Isn't that what you do for me?' Harry asked. 'The immortality part, I mean.'

'Yes, beloved, but this artefact is made by magic and it is one of the wand-wizards most advanced accomplishments.'

“It’s a stone that can make somebody live forever,” Ron said softly. “And it can turn any metal into pure gold!”

“Wow,” Amanda exclaimed softly, her eyes widening. “That’s so cool!”

“Yeah,” Ron agreed and his voice lowered. “But did you know that one of our Professors tried to steal it!”

“Really?”

“Yeah, Professor Quirrell,” Neville said softly, out of nervousness or shyness rather than secrecy. “But Dumbledore arrived in time to stop Quirrell from stealing it.”

“I heard that You-Know-Who was there!” Ron said softly, shuddering at the idea.

“That’s impossible,” Hermione said crossly. “You-Know-Who’s been dead since, well, since Potter here defeated him.”

Harry cocked an amused eyebrow at the bushy-haired girl and watched as she glowered at him. He ducked his head, a small, superior smile on his face as he listened carefully to Ron as the redhead continued.

“In our second year, the school was attacked!” Ron said and looked as if he were enjoying the flashes of shock that Amanda showed, the girl dropping her fork with a loud clatter and leaning forward with her eyes wide. “The chamber of secrets was opened and the monster inside was let out.”

“What happened?” Amanda breathed intently.

“A lot of people were petrified,” Neville answered quietly.

“Like, into stone?” Amanda asked tentatively.

“No, just...frozen stiff, I guess,” Neville answered hesitantly and avoided Amanda’s gaze.

Amanda nodded, a frown appearing on her face as she glanced up and down the hall.

“Did anybody die?” Harry asked, his voice suddenly interested as he looked up and Neville flinched at his bright green gaze and looked away, leaving it up to the redhead to answer.

“No, but it was close,” Ron said, and suddenly looked uncomfortable. “My...um...my sister was taken into the chamber.”

“Is she alright?” Amanda asked in concern, while Harry frowned pensively. It was sounding more and more like Hogwarts wasn’t the safe bastion he had thought it was.

“Yeah, she’s all right now,” Ron said quickly, looking quite relieved as his eyes flickered over a younger, red-haired girl down the table, who was staring at Harry with wide brown eyes. The instant Harry’s eyes met hers, she blushed and looked away.

“Who did it?” Harry asked, turning his penetrating gaze back on Ron.

“It...er...was a...student,” Ron said slowly, scratching his nose as he avoided Harry’s gaze. Next to him, Hermione suddenly looked sympathetic and raised a hand, giving the boy’s shoulder a squeeze. “She was possessed by a dark artefact.”

Amanda, sensing that Harry had wondered into an uncomfortable subject, quickly spoke up,.

“So, what happened?”

“Well, there were talks that the school would close down,” Hermione answered. “But Professor Dumbledore saved us and led a team of Aurors down into the chamber to kill the basilisk.”

“Wow,” Amanda murmured softly.

“Did anything happen last year?” Harry asked quietly.

Ron and Hermione exchanged quick glances with each other, eying Harry carefully as if they knew something about him that he didn't.

“Well, there was an escape from the wizard prison, Azkaban,” Hermione said carefully. “The person who escaped was Sirius Black.”

Harry frowned as he saw both Neville and Ron watching him carefully for his reaction to the name but when his expression didn't change they both looked relieved, although Ron had an air about him that suggested that he knew something that Neville didn't.

“What's that got to do with Hogwarts?” Amanda asked, filling in the small moment of silence.

“Well, he was spotted near the school,” Hermione said carefully, as if she was choosing her words carefully. “The Ministry even sent Dementors to guard us, but he broke in and kidnapped Ron here. But Professor Lupin and Snape saved him and Black got away.”

Harry got the feeling that they weren't telling the entire truth but shrugged it off, honestly not caring about their little secrets.

“Done?” Harry asked Amanda, who nodded as she dropped her fork onto her plate. “Alright, back to the library again.”

“But I want to...” She started protest.

“Shut up and follow me,” Harry said, his voice leaving no room for argument, and Amanda sighed as she stood up under the incredulous gazes of Hermione, Neville and Ron, and trailed after him, leaving the fourth years behind.

“He's not what I expected,” Neville muttered to Ron, who nodded sagely. “Amanda seems nice, though.”

“He treats her like dirt,” Hermione said crossly, huffing in annoyance. “I don’t know why she puts up with it.”

“Maybe they’re dating?” Ron suggested, but frowned. “But you’re right; he did treat her kinda mean.”

“You think he treats her like that all of the time?” Neville asked softly.

Hermione frowned but her eyes widened as she thought about it carefully, biting her lip in thought while Ron and Neville exchanged resigned looks, well used to Hermione’s thought patterns.

“If he does,” She began carefully. “Then we have to look out for her and make sure he doesn’t hurt her.”

“Hurt her? You mean, like...” Ron asked and softly slapped his fist into his hand as he gazed at Hermione, miming a punch.

Hermione nodded solemnly and Ron sighed, shaking his head with wide eyes.

“I never would have expected it from the boy-who-lived,” He muttered.

For the rest of that day, Harry stayed inside the vast library of Hogwarts, content to browse the shelves for books specialising in subjects he was weak in. Although Meciél had amassed a great amount of knowledge about charms and curses, especially fire-based spells, she was definitely lacking knowledge in some of the other subjects, including both Potions and Transfiguration. Harry doubted that he could brew the simplest of potions and the most he could do with transfiguration was to turn a match into a needle and even then he tended to burn the matches into cinder during mid-cast.

Amanda also kept to the library but she was less content than Harry was, and while she had spent an hour or so curled up in one of the chairs as she scrawled in her diary, it didn't take her long before she snapped her diary shut and turned to Harry, who was sitting at a nearby table, with a bored and annoyed expression on her face. For a moment it looked as if she wanted to stand up but a sharp glare from Harry was enough to keep her in her seat.

"Come on," protested Amanda, her eyes pleading with Harry, who remained submersed in his book "Why can't I go anywhere else?"

"Because I'm reading," Harry replied shortly, his eyes never straying from the book as he idly flicked over a page.

"So?" asked Amanda with a childish whine in her voice. "I won't get into any trouble."

"What if you do?" Harry asked coldly, looking up from his book with irritation on his face as he stared into her blue eyes, remaining unaffected by her pleading glance. "What if one of Nicodemus' men, or the bastard himself, manages to kidnap you and take you away?"

Amanda fell silent as she ducked her head, avoiding Harry's dark gaze as he leant forward menacingly, digging the point in deeper.

"They will make you scream before the kill you," He said softly, his voice almost a whisper yet it seemed to echo in the small study area that Harry and Amanda had occupied. "And it will hurt so much so

that you'll wish that you had killed yourself. If you stay with me then I won't let that happen to you. So, shut up and stay in the library."

Amanda watched as Harry sat back and turned back to his book, a disgruntled expression on her face as she pouted, sending a mild glower at him as she folded her arms across her chest.

"You can't keep an eye on me forever," She muttered.

"I don't need to keep an eye on you forever," Harry said, rolling his eyes as he looked up again. "I want to make sure that you're safe while I wait for Nicodemus to make a move against your sister."

"Do you think he'll try it here?" Amanda asked, genuinely curious.

"He'll try," Harry muttered darkly. "I know he will, and when he does try then I'll be able to save your sister, rid myself of the life debt and get the hell out of this place before Dumbledore tries something."

"Rid yourself of the life debt?" Amanda asked slowly, staring at Harry with a questioning look on her face. "What do you mean?"

"Well, I saved your Mum's life, Daniel's life, Mathew's life, Alicia's life, Hope's life, Harry's life – the little one, not me," Harry answered, ticking off the names with his fingers. "I saved your life at Salem by stopping those wand-wizards from killing you. Now I just have to save your sister's life and the debts gone."

"Then why aren't you with her then?" Amanda asked slowly, gazing at Harry carefully, almost as if she were disappointed.

"Molly's with Dumbledore for the afternoon, in a meeting over something or other," Harry answered. "The guy's a lot more powerful than he lets on and he won't let any harm come to her. Besides, I get the feeling that your sister isn't a pushover."

"Oh," Amanda uttered and fell silent as Harry turned back to his book. For a few moments, silence reined in the small study area, until Amanda opened her mouth again, a pensive frown on her face.

“Could she beat you?” She asked in curiosity. “You know, Molly.”

Harry rolled his eyes and looked up, annoyance painted on his expression as he was interrupted yet again.

“No, she couldn’t,” He said flatly. “Now shut up and let me read this. I have no idea why you just can’t transfigure something into gold and I’d like to find out.” He paused, as if he was listening to something elsewhere, and a small mischievous grin came over his face, lighting up his green eyes and making him seem almost childish. “Yes Meciél, I know. She is an idiot.”

Amanda made a face at him but she fell silent, her eyes glazing over as she stared into nothingness. A moment later, she shook her head, opened up her diary again and picked up her quill before she began to scrawl another entry into the small, battered book.

Harry didn’t know how long he had been sitting at the small table in the library, reading his books and occasionally going to the shelves and picking out a new one as both he and Meciél tried to wrap their minds around the concept of Transfiguration. Admittedly, Harry acknowledged that Meciél seemed to be doing a better job than he was and there were some pages in the book where Harry just paused at for a brief second, allowing Meciél to use her photograph-like memory to memorise the words for later use.

Still, after a while, Harry had to reluctantly agree with Amanda as the boredom set in and despite Meciél’s words of protest, he placed the book down on the table with a thump and grimaced as he rubbed his stomach, feeling it rumble in hunger. He looked through the nearest window and blinked with shock as he saw the darkened skyline.

“It’s night?” He muttered in surprise and glanced around the library, seeking Amanda’s presence. Sure enough, the blonde girl had done what she had been told and was curled up in her chair, her eyes closed in a peaceful expression as she dozed off.

Harry blinked at the angelic sight in front of him and with careful, deliberate movements; he softly stepped out of his seat and tiptoed around the table, leaning his head down next to Amanda's. With an almost tender movement, he placed his hand on the side of her face and the girl sighed softly, leaning in against the warmth as Harry lowered his head. He approached her lips but then veered off until his lips touched her ears and he took in a deep breath and screamed loudly.

His voice echoed in the library and he jumped back as Amanda screamed in fear, blinking tiredly as she shot up from her seat, an expression of shock, fear and surprise on her face. She swung her head around quickly, taking in deep breaths, and found Harry standing in front of her, an expression of amusement on his face.

"That wasn't funny!" She hissed angrily but she could feel her cheeks heating up as she blushed under the boys gaze, averting her eyes away and a furious expression came over her face.

"Eh, maybe," Harry replied, still smiling. "But I suppose you just had to be there."

"Shut up," Amanda muttered angrily as she bent down to pick up her diary. She placed it in her robes and stood back up, glaring at Harry with a petulant expression on her face. "What did you want anyway?"

"Dinner, actually," Harry answered as he gestured to the darkened window. "It's probably just starting, so come on. I'm hungry."

Amanda made a face at his back but she followed him out the library, blushing again as a prim-faced librarian glared at them from over her desk.

A few minutes later, Harry and Amanda entered the warm and bright Great Hall. Chattering students mingled with each other, black-robed Hogwarts, furred-coat Dumstrang, blue-cloaked Beauxbatons and crimsoned-robed Salem. The long tables were devoid of food but gleaming silverware glinted under the candlelight, which reflected off the clear, dark illusionary sky above. At the other end of the hall just

in front of the head table sat a small wooden stool. On top of this stool sat a curious device, shaped like a goblet and sparkling with flames.

Harry vaguely remembered seeing something like it at breakfast but he hadn't been paying attention. He wasn't paying attention now either as his eyes roamed the head table, a frown appearing on his face as he saw Dumbledore chatting softly to McGonagall, his blue eyes sparkling, and Snape glowing at him with great fury, his dark eyes shining with hatred. What he didn't see, though, was Molly and there seemed to be a single, absent seat next to the ancient Salem Headmaster and a tiny, white-bearded man.

"Where is that idiot sister of yours?" Harry said slowly, his eyes narrowing with irritation and perhaps a bit of worry.

Amanda certainly looked worried as she frowned in concern, raking her grey eyes over the hall as if she sure that Molly was hiding behind one of the tables. As a crimson-robed Salem student walked by, a particularly tall, dark-haired boy with brown eyes, she turned around and called after him.

"Hey, Richard? Have you seen Professor Carpenter recently?" She asked.

The boy turned around with a polite smile on his face as he addressed the younger girl.

"Sure, Amanda," He said easily. "She was out by the lake a few minutes ago, getting ready for her upcoming classes."

Amanda thanked him as he walked away while Harry sighed in annoyance, a glower of irritation on his face.

"Idiot," He cursed softly, before he gestured to one of the tables and raised his voice as he addressed Amanda. "Look, sit down and stay there. I'll go and get your moronic sister."

“Okay,” Amanda said slowly, eying him strangely, but she saw Hermione waving her over from the Gryffindor table and her expression cleared as she beamed at the fourth year Gryffindor. The bushy haired girl alternated between smiling back and glaring at Harry as Amanda skipped over while Harry turned and left the hall. Harry walked out of the castle doors, slightly flinching as a cold breeze struck his head. He wrapped his robe around him, his face annoyed, and stalked through the courtyard and down the cobbed-stone path. If a regular Hogwarts student had been there to see him, they would have commented that he looked exactly like Snape in a bad mood as Harry’s cloak billowed out around him, his eyes glittering angrily in the darkened night.

He approached the large lake surrounding the castle, which glittered beautifully as the bright moon and stars twinkled down on it. Through the light, Harry saw a womanly figure near the dark and ominous forest and without a second’s hesitation, walked towards her. It took Harry several minutes as he stalked over and stopped behind her, keeping his silence as he faced Molly’s back. The professor tensed as she heard him but she didn’t look away from the lake, her blonde hair swaying in the cold breeze, her fingers clenching as her back straightened.

“Were you dropped on the head as a baby or are you just an idiot?” Harry asked quietly, but there was anger in his voice.

“Excuse me?” Molly exclaimed and spun around, a scowl on her face.

“You do realise that there are people trying to kill you, don’t you?” Harry continued coldly, his eyes boring into Molly’s blue orbs as he glowered at her.

“Really, do you think so?” Molly spat out sarcastically, her blue eyes sparkling in anger.

“I don’t think it, I know it,” Harry growled and gestured to the darkened surroundings with both arms. “If you know this then why are you out here, alone and defenceless?”

Molly narrowed her furious eyes and using one slim hand, reached into her dark-crimson robes and pulled out a small, wooden rod. Harry saw that there had been runes carved into it and many of them were the same runes that had been carved into his sword, designed to help the user channel and cast evocation with a greater degree of control and power. This was the weapon of a true wizard and Harry felt wariness despite himself.

“I have my blasting rod,” Molly responded angrily as she gestured with the wooden rod. “I can take care of myself! I don’t need a Denarian to look after me!”

“Really?” Harry said, sweetness dripping from his voice. “Well, I’m sure Nicodemus will be very impressed when you show him that little stick of yours as he’s raping and torturing you.”

Molly paled and she flinched as if she had been struck. Her eyes glittered with a sudden rush of anger and with a wordless snarl the blasting rod in her hands flew up as she levelled it at Harry. A golden nimbus of power surrounded her, true magic only visible to one like Molly or Harry, and the tip of the blasting rod glowed in a dark-green light. Molly’s lips were pressed firmly against each other and although her entire body was shaking with anger, her arm remained steady and unwavering.

However, the moment she had moved, Harry had embraced Meciél’s dark powers. A roaring wave of fire and sulphur flowed into him, an intoxicating rush of pleasure and the darker desires filling his mind, threatening to overwhelm it but he remained firmly in control. His hand reached into his robes and his wand whipped up just as quick, greasy smoke curling from the carved runes along the side as hellfire poured into the wand-wizard focus.

Both Denarian renegade and True Wizard stared at each, unmoving and silent. Molly glared at Harry with a hard look of anger mingled with disgust, as if the boy revolted her, and Harry returned her glare with look of irritation mixed with cold determination. Given a few more moments, it was likely that a brawl might have started and Molly,

even as a True Wizard, would have probably lost to the more experienced Harry.

However, it didn't come to that as Harry suddenly saw something behind the tall, slender blonde. It was a flash of movement, two gleaming red eyes glittering in the darkness. For a brief second, Harry's eyes widened as he stared at some kind of deformed dog or cat, with tough, leathery skin, large, gleaming fangs and tusks protruding from a snarling snout. In front of him, Molly's gaze flickered past Harry's shoulder and she let out a startled yelp, her eyes widening as she faltered for an instant. But Harry moved as if he had been expecting it, the warm, throbbing presence of Meciél quickly spurning him into action as he redirected his wand.

"Exturbo Arduro!" He bellowed furiously, his voice full of raw anger that fuelled the dark spell as wand-magic poured through his wand.

It emerged as a blinding blast of heat and fire, a bright glare in the darkening night, shooting forward and over Molly's shoulder. The girl gave a yelp as it singed her cheek and lanced towards the dog, striking the deformed creature in the face and driving it into the ground. Flesh sizzled as the dog went down with a pained bark, whining piteously as its once crimson eyes burned away, before it fell silent in death.

But Harry hadn't watched to find out if the dog would stay down and spun around, his wand flying forwards in a fast, long, sweeping movement as he channelled more wand-magic into it, his eyes glittering intensely as the first stages of bloodlust sang in his veins.

"Irruptus Ardor!" He hissed dangerously as he moved and the tip of the wand, still in the middle of the long sweeping movement, glowed with heat as multiple burst of yellow-red fire blasted forward. Two of them struck the ground with small rumbling explosions, sending small showers of dirt and grass through the air, but the third caught a lunging dog in the flank, blasting it away in mid-jump and sending it into the ground, where it let out a single, pitiful whine before falling silent.

“We’re surrounded!” Molly said loudly, her voice panicked and Harry whipped his head up, his eyes narrowed as quickly looked around. His green eyes met the bestial gaze of almost a dozen gleaming red eyes staring back at him. Jaws snapped in the darkness, low angry snarls bursting from several of the creatures as they circled the two humans warily, standing no more than twenty metres away.

The smell of singed fur and seared flesh filled the air as the bodies of the two dead dogs flickered with small flames, glowing softly in the night. Molly levelled her blasting rod in front of her, her eyes panicked but her face grim and Harry gave an experimental flick of his wand, turning around. Together, True-Wizard and Denarian Renegade stood back-to-back as one of the dark dogs let out a piercing howl, before the entire pack lunged forward.

Acting simultaneously, both Harry and Molly struck out with their magic against the snarling dogs. Molly screamed out an incantation, which sounded vaguely Arabic in nature, and furiously gestured at the ground with her blasting rod. The earth in front of her shuddered, dirt quavering and grass vibrating as a huge rumble went through the ground, knocking several of the charging dogs off their feet. The dogs let out surprised yelps as they tumbled over, their balance lost, but one of them managed to avoid the rumble and jumped forward, its eyes gleaming with animalistic bloodlust. However, a long soil-covered tree root burst from the ground and wrapped around the deformed dog, squeezing it mindlessly as the dog howled in agony, its burning eyes dimming as Molly directed the root to crush the dog to death with a short, sharp flick of her rod.

At the same time, Harry gave a short sweep of his wand, his eyes burning with grim pleasure.

“Profundo!” He snarled, his voice clear and sharp, and from the tip of his wand came a powerful rush of glistening water.

As the blast of water sprayed through the air with great force, Harry gave another short flick of his wand and jabbed it forward, a menacingly smile curving his lips. Although there were no flames, a powerful and invisible heat shot forward from his wand and struck the

blast of water, which hissed and spluttered as it boiled over and, propelled forward by the pressure of the heat, billowed out into a cloud of steam that struck four of the dogs head on. The dogs disappeared in the billowing cloud of steam, letting out pained cries as they were driven back by the pressure of the blast, while Harry shifted on his feet and turned to face two more of the rushing dogs, which had almost cleared the twenty metres in a matter of seconds.

His wand whipped up into a whip-like movement and he brought it down on the dogs. From the tip of his wand came a blazing whip of dark flames glowing brightly with the enhanced power of hellfire. The whip coiled forward and with a snap, struck one of the dogs in the flank and gouged a large searing gash into the leathery skin. Flesh sizzled and minute hairs burned as the dog fell to the ground with a whine, while the whip coiled back and then wrapped itself around the second dog, leaving Harry's wand. The dog let out a screeching howl of pain as it disappeared into a cocoon of fire and sulphur, a brightly glowing bonfire that lit up the lake as the dog was incinerated in a matter of mere seconds.

Molly gestured violently with her blasting rod, a fumbling and clumsy movement but it worked and the ground where the dogs were jumping back on their feet slightly rumbled. Suddenly, the earth exploded with a loud thundering clap as a geyser of stone and dirt flew up into the air as if the ground had just been struck by artillery. The concussive blast knocked the staggering dogs off their feet for the second time in seconds, sending them sprawling to the ground. But for the dog that had been standing where the blast originated, it was not so lucky and was instantly shredded apart by the force of the spell, its body torn apart.

"Siagrus!" incanted Harry quickly, a bloodthirsty grin on his face as he gestured his wand at the earth in front of him. A shimmering pulse of near invisible magic blasted from his wand and struck ground around him, which hissed with steam and smoke as the earth boiled to magma in a matter of moments.

Then, with a quick flick and a snappy incantation, Harry sent forward a fiery blast. The streak of fire, fuelled by the darker emotions and hellfire, lanced forward but missed both of the approaching dogs. It

exploded on the ground, creating a small fountain of heated debris and a loud, thundering clap of noise as both dogs lunged forward. The first struck the small patch of magma and let out a piercing whine of anguish it caught alight, its body blazing with fire as its legs literally liquefied under the heat and it collapsed into the magma, dead. The second dog jumped over the magma and jumped for Harry, its eyes gleaming as its leap for Harry's throat. But Harry made a short, sharp gesture with his wand and the dog didn't even make a noise as a deadly shimmering arc of silver magic sliced forward, gutting and killing the dog in an instant.

Harry and Molly's initial volley of violent magic had been very effective in the first ten seconds of the fight, but now several of the snarling dogs had closed in and the danger had suddenly gotten more real. Molly, with her back pressed at Harry's, frowned in concentration as she visualised her spell carefully. Three dogs approached her at a sprint and when they were no less than five metres, they jumped for her throat, baring drooling fangs menacingly, while one more limped after them.

Suddenly the ground in front of Molly exploded with a rumbling roar as dozens of sharp stone stalagmites sprouted upwards, impaling all three of the jumping dogs with great force. Molly made another furious gesture with her staff, her lips peeling off a foreign incantation, and another geyser of earth exploded in front of her. The limping dog managed to avoid most of the blast, dirt and stone raining down upon it, but it suddenly shimmered as fire jutted into its body, crushing its skull with searing heat and impressive force.

Molly blinked in surprise and she turned her head despite herself. Surprise clouded her features as she saw Harry turn away from her, his wand whipping through the air as a dog covered in searing burns approached him.

"Evertoxuro!" He shouted with a maddened laugh, his eyes alight with bloodlust, and a jet of fire sprayed from his wand like a flamethrower. Billowing clouds of smoke flooded into the air and the flames struck forward towards the dog, no more than six or seven metres away. The dog howled in agony as it was devoured by a constant jet of fire, disappearing underneath the blazing inferno.

When the spell broke two or three seconds later, the dog had been reduced to a pile of sizzling flesh and charred bone.

Molly turned away and cleared her mind as she whipped out her blasting rod again, a furious incantation leaping off her lips. The ground shuddered as the earth rolled forward, pushing away some of the wounded and yelping dogs. Suddenly she saw a flash of movement in the corner of her eye and she shifted on her feet, her head swivelling around. Molly saw a dog lunging forward; it was close enough that she could see gleaming fangs about to strike her throat, and she took in a deep breath as if she were about to scream, her blasting rod swinging around in vain.

When the dog was less than thirty centimetres away from Molly's throat, a cone of fire zapped forward and struck the snarling beast, the fire radiating with an unholy dark light. Crimson veins of red and violet light flickered through the intense cone of heat and flame and the sharp smell of sulphur filled the air as it dug into the snarling dog, propelling it backwards as it vaporised the large chunk of its flank with a flash of bright light that pained Molly's eyes. She swivelled her head shakily and saw Harry standing behind her, his wand levelled in front of him as he gave her a superior smirk. Suddenly his eyes widened and his gaze swung to her left and Molly whipped around, her eyes widening again as another dog took Harry and Molly's brief moment of distraction to attack.

It leapt for the slender blonde but a wing of sharp bone lanced forward, impaling the creature with sharp hook-like points. Dark blood dribbled down bones of the purest white as Harry extended his wing forward; his eyes alight with both demonic rage and an intoxicating pleasure. He hurled it away with great force and the creature landed on the ground with a dull thump.

Molly turned around again, eyes wide with both astonishment and no small amount of fear, but Harry ignored her gaze as he lowered his wand. The runes in the slim piece of wood glowed like embers as smoke curled upwards; smelling faintly of burnt wood and sulphur. Harry looked both grim and excited at the same time, his green eyes darkened with pleasure and bloodlust as he surveyed the area, noting three limping dogs that disappeared within the dark forest before

them. He let go of Meciél's power and almost sighed in disappointment as the power left him, taking the intoxicating feelings of pleasure with it. Next to him, Harry saw that the girl's glowing golden nimbus was slowly fading as she lowered her blasting rod, still staring at him with wide eyes.

"You saved my life," Molly murmured in surprise, staring at him and shaking her head slowly. "You saved my life, twice!"

"And here you were telling me that you could protect yourself," Harry said smugly and watched as Molly flushed. "Well, so far, I'd say you're doing a bad job. Not that I care anymore, since I'm outa here."

Molly regarded him with confusion and Harry rolled his eyes, but his good mood would not be ruined as he patiently explained what he meant.

"The life debt has been repaid," He said. "I saved your family, Charity and her brats, from Nicodemus' men. I saved Amanda's life from those wand-wizards and now I saved your life from those weird-looking dogs. That's everybody except your father."

'I do not include him in the debt anyway,' Meciél said in agreement, her voice softly whispering into his ear. 'He was in the party that wounded you in the first place. You are right, beloved. You are free of the debt and you have kept the honour of the Old World. I am very proud of you.'

"Nicodemus will be back," Molly said slowly. "He won't stop here and he won't let this stop him!"

"That's not my problem anymore, is it?" Harry responded cheerfully, almost glowing at Meciél's praise as he idly retracted his bloodied wing back into his back. "I've repaid the debt and I've made that bastard slow down and reconsider his next moves. It's been a good couple of days."

“So, now what?” Molly asked carefully, a hint of relief in her voice as if she was glad to be getting rid of him. “You’ll just leave us alone now?”

“There’s nothing that ties me here anymore,” Harry said, shrugging his shoulders as he placed his wand back into his robes. Still, his emerald eyes kept scanning the forest as he watched out for anymore dogs as he kept talking. “So, I’ll grab my stuff, leave this stupid castle and hope we never see each other again.”

Without another word, Harry turned around and quickly made his way back to the castle and after a few seconds, Molly joined him as the two of them left a scene of devastation and death behind, the broken, bloodied and burnt bodies of the dogs slowly dissolving as the magic that kept them animated broke away.

“...and the Triwizard Champion for Salem Wizard and Witch’s Institute is...Richard Banks!” Dumbledore finished with a flourish of his hands and twinkling eyes.

The Great Hall erupted with polite claps from the Hogwarts, Beauxbatons and Durmstrang students and a wave of furious cheers from the crimson-robed Salem students, who howled and cat-called as a tall, dark-haired and brown-eyed boy stood up, blushing under the scrutiny as he quickly walked through the small doorway he had been directed to.

Over at the Gryffindor table, Amanda clapped absently as she eyed the Great Hall doors with a worried frown on her face. Where was Harry and Molly? They should have been back by now and Amanda felt a wave of dread as the possibility of an attack entered her mind. She barely heard Dumbledore speak again as she bit her lip in worry, frowning anxiously.

“Now, for the tournament, I expect that...” Dumbledore started amongst the whisperings and mutterings of the Great Hall but he stopped, looking surprised as the goblet of fire flared with red light once more.

The spectacle was enough to draw even Amanda's attention as the hall fell silent with surprise and confusion.

"Aren't there only meant to be four champions?" Amanda heard Ron whisper to Hermione, but the bushy-haired girl impatiently shushed him and he frowned, turning back to the goblet of fire.

Amanda watched as a torn piece of paper was spat out of the goblet amidst the astonished gazes of the entire hall, Professors, students and visiting dignitaries alike. Dumbledore reflexively caught the paper, moving faster than one might assume for a man of his age it, and glanced down. When he looked up, Amanda shuddered as he twinkles gaze turns upon her, searching around her for somebody. With a start of surprise, Amanda knew exactly what name the Headmaster was going to call out as the wizened old man opened his mouth, his voice reverberating through the hall.

"Harry Potter!"

Harry walked briskly back to the castle, the last remnants of both Hellfire and adrenaline leaving his body as the warm glow in the pit of his stomach disappeared. He repressed a shiver as the icy wind cut into him but ignored it as he reached the cobble-stoned pathway and turned around, waiting for Molly.

The tall, blonde girl was panting and huffing as she slowly dragged herself up the path. Her blue eyes glared at him furiously, as if she were daring him to make a joke about it. Naturally, Harry obliged.

“Don’t tell me that that one little fight wore you out?” He asked incredulously, a satisfied smile curving his lips as he shook his head in mock-pity. “Tsk, ts, ts. And you were telling me that you could take care of yourself.”

“Shut up,” Molly growled angrily as she reached him, her hand clutching her blasting rod with whitened knuckles.

“You’re not really used to hurling around those types of magics, are you?” Harry asked in genuine curiosity.

“No, not really,” Molly admitted between pants. “My teacher told me that I was better at the subtle stuff rather than the power-heavy stuff. You know, stuff like veils and...”

“Yeah, whatever,” Harry interrupted loudly, waving Molly off. “I was just making conversation since you were taking your time.”

Molly glared at him irritably but he had already turned away, shaking his head in amusement as he entered Hogwarts and stepped into the castle.

Harry entered the Great Hall with a small skip in his step and a satisfied smile on his face, but it faltered as the entire hall swivelled around to stare at him and he stopped. Confusion, disbelief, annoyance and even anger blazed towards him. Dumbledore was standing at the other end of the hall, a piece of paper clutched in his gnarled hands as he stared at Harry with a mixture of curiosity and speculation. There were many other similar expressions at the head

table, although a few people he didn't know, including a white haired man with dark blue eyes and thick, heavy-set woman, far taller than even Dumbledore, were regarding him with the first stirrings of anger.

It was at that moment that Snape arose from the table, his cheeks flushed and his obsidian eyes burning with anger as he glared at Harry, although Harry felt a flash of satisfaction as the man refused to meet his eyes.

"Potter!" He hissed coldly. "Why am I not..."

Harry quickly cut him off as he raised a placating hand, silencing the sallow-faced man as he walked forward with a beaming smile. He let out a fake laugh of modesty as he shook his head and gestured to himself grandly as he addressed the entire hall.

"I know I'm a hero, people, and I normally don't allow people to talk in my presence," He said charmingly and winked at Snape, who was shuddering as if anger was taking over him. "But in this case I'll allow it. Please continue, Severus."

Snape opened his mouth, his bone fingers clutching into the head table, but Dumbledore interrupted him in a quiet voice as he stared at Harry carefully, slowly stroking a beard with one hand.

"Mr Potter, I believe you have some explaining to do," He said quietly.

"Yeah, I've thought about it and I found out that I really don't think I have to explain anything," Harry said, nodding his head wisely and stopped, peering forward with a look of concern. "Unless this is about the age thing, because I know your eyesight's giving out on you so if you wanted me to read those retirement home pamphlets for you, I will."

"No, Mr Potter, I don't think I've reached that point quite yet," remarked Dumbledore, almost dryly as he peered at Harry over his half-moon glasses.

Harry shrugged and then turned to Amanda over at the Gryffindor table

“Debts over, brat,” He said cheerfully, jerking his hand back at Molly, who had just entered the hall and was watching the proceedings in puzzlement. “I guess I’ll be seeing you never again. I’d say I had fun, but then I’d be a liar.”

“The debt’s over?” Amanda asked in surprise and looks at both Molly and Harry closely, noting her sister’s weary posture. “You mean, just now...?”

“Yep,” Harry answered cheerfully.

“Potter, get over here!” growled on one of the Professors and Harry turned to face him, blinking in shock as he took in the man’s full appearance.

The man had obviously been in some fights and had been on the receiving end of a few well-placed curses. There were faded scars all over the man’s face – a piece of his nose seemed to have been cut off. The man had a battered wooden leg and gnarled, twisted fingers as he rubbed his grizzled face agitatedly. One of his eyes was normal but the other had been replaced by a brightly-glowing blue orb, which spun around in the socket as the man limped from the head table, taking a position near Dumbledore.

“Whoa,” Harry said quietly, peering at the man carefully. “Somebody really hacked the crap through you.”

“Mr Potter, if you could step this way,” Dumbledore said and gestured at a door on the other side of the Great Hall.

“Nah, I can’t. My room’s the other way,” Harry said as he slowly shook his head, the normal jeering tone in his voice disappearing. Something was off in the room. Perhaps it was the way that everybody was looking at him, but Harry was certain that they all knew something that he didn’t. He hated that feeling.

‘Don’t we all, beloved.’ Meciél said, sounding quite amused, but Harry ignored her as he let a frown come over his face.

“Mr Potter, I believe that you may want to do this in some relative privacy,” Dumbledore said quietly.

Harry was suddenly feeling very wary as he glanced around the hall, his hand casually slipping into his robes as he gripped his wand. He narrowed his eyes as he gazed at Dumbledore carefully; tightening his grip on his wand as he mentally prepared himself for the worst. He knew he shouldn’t have come here, even if he was trying to remove his debt!

Dumbledore must have seen something on his face because he raised his hands in a placating gesture, his blue eyes softening as he regarded Harry openly.

“I give you my word I do not mean you harm,” He said quietly and sincerely. “But we need to talk.”

Harry picked up an intense look in the blue gaze, a glint of knowledge, and he frowned as he sensed something deeper than the words. Apparently Dumbledore knew what a promise like that meant to somebody who followed the Old Rules like Meciél.

‘The man seems to have an understanding of Old World rules,’ Meciél said quietly.

‘Do I go in?’

‘He does seem worried and I do not believe he will try anything with so many children nearby.’ Meciél answered carefully, a tinge of worry in her voice. ‘Still, be wary, beloved. My powers are at your disposal, should you find yourself in need.’

Without taking his eyes off Dumbledore, Harry gave a short nod and strode across the hall without another word, opening the door and disappearing into the small antechamber.

Harry opened the door and entered a small room, lined with moving portraits of wizards and witches. On the opposite side of the room in a small fireplace blazed a brightly lit fire. Standing around the fire were four people, all who looked up as he came in.

There was a rough, burly boy in Durmstrang robes who looked as if he had been struck across the face several times with a blunt instrument. He had a rugged athletic appearance and stared into the flames, his dark east-European eyes distant. Standing next to that boy was a tall, beautiful girl with shimmering pale hair and an aura of splendour and beauty around her. Her blue eyes swivelled over him and disdain showed on her prim, proper face as she dismissed him as quickly as she had assessed him.

Representing Salem in the small group was a tall boy with dark-brown hair, dark eyes and a flat forehead- the same boy that had directed Harry to Molly at the entrance of the Great Hall no less than half-an-hour ago. Finally, the last boy was a tall, seventh-year in Hogwarts robes with light-brown hair and dark grey eyes, and he stared curiously at Harry with a polite and open expression on his face.

“Do they want us back inside?” He asked curiously.

“Don’t know, don’t care,” Harry said flatly as he stalked across the room, choosing a spot underneath a fat, dark-haired witch and eying the door carefully as Dumbledore and an assorted company of people walked in, including both Professor McGonagall and Snape.

A blonde-haired man was the first one to speak, his blue eyes sparkling with something like excitement. He had baby-faced cheeks, a nose that looked as if it had been broken more than once and faint remnants of a previous peak physical condition, which had been driven away by good living.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, may I present to you the fifth champion of the Triwizard tournament, Harry Potter!” The man cried out exuberantly.

“This is outrageous, Bagman!” One of the other men said. He had snowy-white hair, cold blue eyes and a faint aristocratic face, which was twisted up into anger at the present moment. “Hogwarts cannot have two champions? Rest assured that I will be filing an official protest with your government over this travesty!”

“Madame Maxine,” The beautiful girl by the fireplace asked with a heavily accented French voice. “What are zey saying? Is zis a joke?”

“The Goblet of Fire has chosen this boy as a champion, Fleur,” replied an extremely tall- twice as big as Harry was at least- woman said. She had short-cropped black hair and dark eyes and she frowned at Harry with both confusion and disdain.

“That’s impossible!” The brooding Durmstrang champion said thickly, his gruff voice filled with surprise. His eyes flew to Harry and his gaze darkened sourly.

“It seems that it’s not so impossible, Krum,” Karkaroff said darkly, switching his angry glare from both Bagman, who shrugged it off with casual ease, and Harry.

Harry stared back, unimpressed, and loudly cleared his throat. But he was ignored as Karkaroff switched his gaze to a greying man with a stern demeanour. He had dark eyes and a wearied expression on his severe face as he stared into the fire, seemingly lost in his own thoughts.

“Crouch, you are the Head of the Department of International Magical Co-operation!” Karkaroff protested loudly, his voice ringing within the room. “After months of negotiation, surely you cannot allow this to continue!”

The man frowned, still gazing into the fire. When he opened his mouth, his voice was soft and quiet, yet held a tone as if he was used to being obeyed.

“The rules say that whoever is chosen by the Goblet of Fire must participate in the tournament.”

Karkaroff let off a low growl at the exact moment that Harry let out a loud sigh of annoyance.

“Clears throat!” He said loudly, halting the conversation and drawing the entire room’s attention onto himself as he stepped forward, an annoyed expression on his face. “Somebody mind telling me what the hell is going on?”

“Don’t give us any of that, Potter,” Snape hissed coldly, his expression dark and foreboding as he glared down at Harry. “You know very well what we are referring to! Did you honestly think you could get away with it?”

“Yeah, you’ll have to forgive me for not wanting to put up with any of your bullshit, Snape,” Harry snapped back in irritation. “It’s been a long tiring night involving a pack of deformed dogs trying to rip me apart. Get to the point.”

“Dogs?” The seventh-year Hogwarts boy mouthed quietly. Dumbledore also had a small frown creasing his face but it cleared as he answered Harry’s question quietly, regarding him with a mixture of suspicion and even wariness.

“The Goblet of Fire has chosen you to be a champion of the Triwizard tournament,” He answered quietly.

“That’s the little school competition you’ve got going, right?” Harry asked slowly, a puzzled frown on his face.

“The Triwizard tournament is a greatly revered event!” Karkaroff snapped at him, looking almost wounded by Harry’s flippant question. “To be chosen is a great honour and responsibility! Many apply but only one student from each school is chosen! Can you see the problem now?”

“Whatever,” Harry remarked uncaringly. “You can stop making a fuss because I really can’t be stuffed participating in a stupid little tournament.”

His words sent the entire room into a stunned silence. Karkaroff, Bagman, Crouch and Madame Maxine stared at him in bewilderment while the French girl, Fleur, visibly started as she stared at him with wide eyes. Bagman was the first to recover as a blinding smile washed over his face.

“You don’t understand, Harry,” He said jovially. “When you’re chosen by the Goblet of Fire, you’re bound into an ancient magical contract. You have to participate. The Goblet of Fire ensures it.”

“No, what I have to do is see how much fire this goblet can hold before it explodes,” Harry said slowly, shaking his head. “I’ll say it again. No.”

“Harry...” Bagman began.

“Make me,” Harry interrupted bluntly, a defiant expression on his face as he folded his arms over his chest.

“The general purpose of a magical contract is to ensure that the parties fulfil their duties,” Crouch remarked dryly. “The contract will make you participate.”

“If you don’t want to be in the tournament, then why did you put in your name?” The Hogwarts boy asked in confusion, staring at Harry with a befuddled expression on his face.

“I didn’t,” Harry said with gritted teeth.

“How did you get past the age-line?” McGonagall asked sharply.

“’ E is clearly not of ze right age,” Fleur protested sharply.

“What a spectacular piece of detective work, Sherlock,” Harry snapped at her, and she huffed, glaring at him with beautiful crystal-blue eyes as the questions continued.

“Did somebody help you put your name in?” Madame Maxine asked shrewdly. “A Hogwarts Professor, perhaps?”

“I didn’t put my name in!” Harry growled at her angrily as both his irritation and his anger rose.

“Then why were you chosen?” Karkaroff pressed, his eyes glinting angrily.

“How the fuck should I know!” Harry snarled, ignoring McGonagall’s shocked exclamation of ‘language!’ and the look Dumbledore gave him at the vehement response. “I just got here! I don’t know what the fuck is going on!”

The room was silent as Harry glared at the group in front of him with blazing green eyes. Distantly, beneath his anger, he felt a twitch of amusement and satisfaction as several of the people, including Maxine and Bagman, avoided his eyes uncomfortably.

“One has to agree that this is all a little suspicious,” Snape remarked quietly into the silence, his dark eyes glinting with enjoyment at Harry’s anger. “You conveniently arrive at Hogwarts just a day before the Goblet of Fire is to choose names for the tournament and now you have been chosen.”

‘The man is right, beloved.’ Meciél said soothingly, her warm glow burning away his anger as Harry abruptly calmed down. ‘Calm yourself. At this moment, anger will do you no good.’

“Despite the fact that you’re a dirty piece of grease, you’re right,” Harry said slowly, the anger in his voice gone. “Nobody knew I was coming here, so why would somebody want me in the tournament unless.....”

Harry suddenly stiffened as he swung his gaze at Dumbledore, anger building up in his eyes as the room fell silent.

“Unless somebody wanted me to stay at Hogwarts, to keep me here,” He concluded softly.

Karkaroff shifted his eyes over towards Dumbledore, suspicion paramount on his face but Dumbledore was already shaking his aged head, his eyes serious.

“I promise you thrice-bound that I did not put your name in the Goblet of Fire,” the old wizard said sincerely, making Harry blink. “I also promise you that I do not know who placed your name in the Goblet.”

‘A Faerie promise,’ Meciél mused softly. ‘How...interesting. It seems Dumbledore here knows quite a bit about our rules.’

‘Your rules,’ Harry corrected absently, before he shook his head and let out an annoyed sigh. “Whatever. Look, I’m not playing in your stupid game and you can’t make me. I know how these things work and I know I didn’t put my name in this Goblet of yours. I also know that I have a thing about writing down my full name, so, if I haven’t spelt the name out then I’m not bound. Case closed, end of the story, jury dismissed and all that crap.”

“If he’s telling the truth, then he’s right,” Karkaroff murmured. “Show us the parchment, Dumbledore.”

Dumbledore lifted up his hand and showed the small ripped piece of parchment in his hands. Harry could see that his full name, Harry James Potter, had been written down in a curvy feminine slant and frowned.

Suddenly, McGonagall gasped and her eyes widened as her hand flew up to her chest, clutching her heart. Everybody turned to stare at the greying Transfiguration teacher as she slowly extended her arm and took the piece of parchment from Dumbledore’s hand, staring at it carefully.

“I know who wrote this,” She murmured. “I saw them write it.”

“Who was it, Minerva?” Dumbledore asked quietly.

McGonagall turned her eyes towards Harry, both surprise and grief in her eyes as she stared at him sadly.

“It was Lily Potter, just a few days after Harry here was born,” She said quietly. “She wrote it in the Hogwarts Book of Names, registering her son’s position at Hogwarts. I recognised the writing and the paper.”

Most of the people in the room frowned incomprehensibly but Dumbledore stared at the paper with something akin to understanding, exhaling loudly as he absently stroked his beard. At the same time, within Harry’s head, Meciél also let out a small flash of comprehension.

“What does that mean?” Harry asked both of them, his irritated voicing shattering the silence in the room.

‘It means that this contract is magically binding,’ Meciél answered him.

“Lily and James Potter named you, Harry,” Dumbledore answered softly. “One of the greatest gifts a parent can give to their child is a name, an identity and uniqueness. You and I know that names hold a certain power to both the person it belongs to and to those who know it. At that time, so soon after your birth, Lily would have been in the brief stage where her use of your name would have the true, for lack of a better word, pronunciation. This piece of writing here is the closest thing to your name than anything else, save if you told somebody what your name was.”

“So...” Harry trailed off as realisation flooded his features.

“So you are bound to this contract,” Dumbledore finished and frowned speculatively. “Whoever did this had a very fine understanding of the nature of magical contracts.”

“You have got to be shitting me,” Harry swore softly as anger burned in his veins, his eyes blazing furiously. “This has to be some kind of sick joke! I was just about to leave, for fuck’s sake!”

“You really didn’t put your name in, did you?” The Hogwarts boy asked, frowning in puzzlement.

“Actually, I did,” Harry deadpanned, turning his angry gaze towards the boy as a note of mockery filled his voice. “Ever since I was born, I dreamt and dreamt that one day, I could play in the marvellous and oh-so wonderful triblizzard game.”

“It’s Triwizard,” The boy coughed nervously, ducking his eyes away from Harry.

“Whatever,” Harry snapped impatiently.

“Zen if you deedn’t do it, zen somebody else did,” Fleur said slowly.

“Again, I marvel at your skills of logic and deduction,” Harry said flatly. “Tell me, did you win any ribbons in primary school?”

Fleur stared at him flatly, clearly not impressed with his manner as she sniffed haughtily.

“It is more probable zat you did it, no?” She said snootily. “Becoming ze champion, it is a great ‘onour.”

“Lady, I’m a hero,” Harry said and flashed a triumphant look at Snape, who gritted his teeth angrily but remained silent. “I don’t need to play in this game to become a champion. I’m already a champion.”

“So, the prospect of one-thousand gold galleons doesn’t interest you?” The Hogwarts boy asked mildly, making Harry blink.

“A thousand, you say?” Harry asked carefully. “And was that gold you mentioned?”

“Perhaps you made a deal with somebody,” The Salem boy, Richard, speculated thoughtfully. “In exchange for them putting your name in the Goblet, you’ll give them half the money if you win.”

“Unlikely,” Harry snorted. “Nobody knows me that well enough to make that kind of deal and those that do know that I’d stab them in the back the first chance I got.”

Richard blinked at Harry’s frank statement and opened his mouth to respond, but somebody beat him to it as the grizzled cripple with the one leg walked forward with a limp, leaning heavily on his cane.

“The tournament’s a dangerous event,” The man growled. “How many participants have died in the past, Crouch?”

Harry caught the undertone and frowned, a glimmer of worry appearing in his eyes.

“You think somebody might be trying to kill me?” He asked the cripple carefully, frowning in thought. It was a reasonable assumption; goodness knows Harry had his share of enemies. There was Nicodemus and his lot, the other factions from the Order of the Blackened Denarius, the Knights of the Cross (even if he did save one of their families, Harry made no assumptions that they would be any friendlier to him) and even the unknown party who had summoned and sent a demon after him a few days ago.

“Anything’s possible,” The cripple said, his one eye gleaming with something like fanaticism. His blue eye swivelled in its socket as the man limped forward, eying Harry carefully. “And as you said, you’re a hero. There are a lot of people who would want to see you hurt.”

“Zat is impossible,” Fleur said flatly. “Nobody would do zat.”

“You haven’t met my enemies, so I’ll forgive you for underestimating their great hatred of me,” Harry said mockingly as he dismissed the French girl, turning to the crippled man in front of him. “Still, the enemies I have aren’t exactly subtle. They’re more “jump in and rip apart anything in our way” than “plant a dagger in an old Roman geezer’s back.””

“Hmm,” The crippled man muttered, his face twisting up into a horrible distortion of scars and damaged tissue as he frowned.

“Besides, they didn’t know that I was here,” Harry said.

“Then it was a crime of opportunity,” The man said slowly, suspicion building in his voice as he continued, his eyes burning with fervour. “Somebody heard you were here today and improvised a plan to trap you.”

Harry was silent as the man’s fake eye swivelled around to the other side of his skull and he somehow knew that the man could see Karkaroff standing behind him.

“It was somebody who had access to goblet, somebody who has skills in powerful dark magic, somebody who has a grudge against Potter here for old defeats,” The man continued, his voice turning into a hiss of accusation as Karkaroff paled, his eyes darting around nervously.

“You think I did this?” The Headmaster of Durmstrang exclaimed. “I truly regret that part of my life, Moody, but it is over! I have been able to move on and I can see that you have not!”

“Once a dark wizard, always a dark wizard,” The crippled man, Moody, snarled with anger, and Karkaroff paled, his cold eyes glittering brightly.

“Alastror, Igor! That is enough!” Dumbledore intervened, his powerful voice halting both men in their tracks. “This will lead us nowhere.”

“You’re right about that,” Harry said loudly, an angry scowl on his face as he turned away from the group. “I’m sick of this stupid soap-opera drama and I’m sick of being bound by debts I don’t want to fulfil. I’m not playing in your stupid little game, so you can all go to hell, and yes Dumbledore, I know the irony of that statement, but do you know what? I really couldn’t help myself.”

He turned for the door, ignoring the sudden hisses and mutters from the small group as he briskly strode across the room. Suddenly, he stumbled as a blazing streak of agony sliced into his heart. He let out a cry of pain as the piercing streak of pain slammed into his mind, driving out all of his anger, irritation and any other present emotion as his entire world went white.

Distantly, he felt himself fall to the ground, his body thumping on the wood as his eyes stared blankly at the ceiling, his face contorted in pain. In the back of his mind, he could vaguely hear the distant words of Meciél but her warmth was useless against the pain as he twisted and flailed. Suddenly, the agony fled as quickly as it had come and Harry panted in relief, letting out a pained cough as he looked up, fury stirring in his eyes.

“W-what the hell are you d-doing to me?” Harry gasped out, reaching into his robes and whipping out his wand in a flash. The tip of the slim wooden stick flared in a burning dark light, but Dumbledore moved far quicker than an old man his age should and Harry felt his wand get ripped from his grasp the instant he had pulled it out.

“It is the magical contract sensing that you are breaking it!” Crouch said quickly, faint traces of concern on his face as he bent down next to Harry.

“T-then make it stop!”

“We can’t,” Dumbledore said quietly. “Only you can.”

Harry let a snarl curl his lips but the shudders running through his body combined with Meciél's presence, which seemed to be in as much pain as he was, left him no other choice.

"F-Fine!" He snarled. "I'll p-play in your stupid fucking game!"

The flaring heat of agony, which had just started building up again, dissipated instantly as Harry lay back down on the ground, his eyes pained but furious as he pondered his next move, almost unaware of Dumbledore helping him up and leading him to the hospital wing. Somebody was going to pay for this; that Harry was sure of.

Moody watched as the boy fell to the ground, surprise twisting through his features. He barely noticed the shrieks of panic from the female contestant, that stupid French bint or that fool Bagman letting out a startled cry of surprise as Potter fell to the ground, his face twisted up into agony. For a second, Moody blinked, another face that had looked much like that over thirteen years ago flashing through his mind, but he drove it away with his impeccable Occlumency and replaced it with the real Moody's memories and feelings.

Both Crouch and Dumbledore rushed for the boy as Moody stayed back, hovering just at earshot as Dumbledore crouched down. The boy was flailing about, his entire body shuddering and Moody could tell that the only reason he wasn't screaming was because he couldn't get his vocal cords to work. He had both been on the receiving end of such a curse and had caused feelings like that in others.

Moody watched as the boy reluctantly agreed to participate and let a frown pierce his face as he glared at Karkaroff, very real hate bubbling inside of him as he stared at the traitor, who shifted uncomfortably away from the supposed Auror. But mingled in with that hate was a coil of joy and elation, such that Moody almost sighed in pleasure as it swept through him.

Originally, his Lord had sent him here to trap the most powerful, young burgeoning wizard from all four major schools of magic to use in the ritual. But when Potter had come along, Moody had decided that it was too great of an opportunity to pass over and with a quick

trip through McGonagall's office and the Hogwarts Book of Names and half-an-hour alone with the Goblet of Fire, Moody had managed to fool the artefact into accepting Potter as a champion- the only champion for the 'fifth' school.

A feral grin threatened to sweep over Moody's scarred face as he pondered the future. Potter certainly didn't seem like a weak-willed or pathetic mudblood wizard and Moody had sensed a darker power surrounding the teen. With his blood in his Lord and the second part of the revival ceremony described to him by those new cultist freaks, when his Lord arose again, there would be no stronger wizard in the world!

But for the moment, he had to remain hidden, especially with Dumbledore, Karkaroff and his father, Crouch, here. He had to be patient if he was going to get Potter to the cup first. It was patience that had allowed him to escape his father's Imperius. He could do this. He was Barty Crouch Jr; the Dark Lord's most faithful!

When Harry had closed his eyes, he had been leaning against the tall and surprisingly strong form of Dumbledore as the two of them walked to the Hospital Wing, reluctantly using the old man as a support as his entire body throbbed with the painful after-effects of the magical contract. As he had gratefully, if not grudgingly, slid into the warm bed, the last thing he had seen before he had let the weariness overtake him was the crystal blue eyes and wrinkled face of the old Headmaster.

Twelve hours later as Harry woke up, warm and comfortable, the first thing he saw was the crystal blue eyes and wrinkled old face of the Headmaster. He eyed the man with something akin to anger and resentment as he sat up in the bed, carelessly throwing off the white sheets as he let out a loud yawn, not bothering to cover his mouth as he stared at Dumbledore rudely.

“I’m glad to see that you are awake,” Dumbledore said quietly as he sat next to Harry’s bed, looking extremely pensive.

Harry scoffed rudely but didn’t say anything as he stretched out his arms. He frowned as he felt cold air meet skin and glanced down to see that his robes were gone and that they had been replaced with a set of warm, if slightly small, pyjama’s.

‘You don’t think he undressed me himself, do you,’ Harry thought softly, distaste in his tone.

‘I do not believe so, beloved,’ answered Meciél softly with both humour and concern in her voice. ‘You appear to be well. It is good that the contract seems to have left no permanent damage, despite how painful it was.’

‘Urgh, pain,’ Harry thought despairingly. He frowned, both mentally and literally, as a thought popped into his head. ‘Still, you got to wonder why a wand-wizard as powerful as this runs a school of all things. Maybe he has inclinations towards kids. Hey, you don’t think that I need to worry for my innocence, do you?’

‘You, my beloved, have a one-track mind,’ Meciell replied in amusement and Harry felt some of her concern lift at his usual sardonic comments. ‘Besides, you lost any innocence you may have had long ago, so you may be relatively safe.’

‘I wasn’t talking about that kind of innocence,’ Harry thought with a grunt, before Dumbledore stirred, sighing mournfully and stroking his beard.

Harry focussed his gaze on the elder wizard and blinked, noticing how old and wearied the man looked as he sat there. A coil of satisfaction twisted in his gut and he suppressed a pleased smile. Good, he wasn’t the only one who was suffering over something.

“I understand that you may be upset...” Dumbledore started quietly.

“Upset?” Harry interrupted incredulously. “This face isn’t showing “Oh no, I just got bound into a magical contract that forces me to participate in a stupid tournament, what am I going to do?” No, this is my “Oh no, I just got bound into a magical contract that forces me to participate in a stupid tournament, who am I going to have to kill” face.”

Dumbledore raised an eyebrow, not looking impressed with Harry’s attitude as he eyes dimmed. Harry sighed, rolled his own eyes and learnt forward, lowering his voice into a mock whisper.

“Psst!” He whispered loudly and secretively, as if he was imparting on a great secret. “That means that I’m really pissed off!”

“Understandably so,” Dumbledore said quietly. “You have been forced into a tournament you did not want to participate on and bound into a contract you did not sign.”

“You see, you get it,” Harry said sarcastically, but Dumbledore purposefully ignored him as he continued.

“Rest assured that I have personally bewitched the Hogwarts Book of names to ensure that this does not happen again,” The Headmaster finished firmly.

“And...This helps me how?” Harry asked slowly.

“I thought that you may find comfort in the fact that nobody else will suffer through a situation like this by those means,” Dumbledore answered, and Harry snorted.

“Yeah, you’ll find out that I only care about four people in this crappy place,” He said and gestured to himself, nodding sagely as he counted them out. “There’s me, myself, I and my invisible best friend.”

“You have a right to be upset, Harry, but I do suggest that you curb your tongue,” Dumbledore suggested but his voice held not the slightest bit of anger at Harry’s antics and Harry sighed in annoyance. “At least, until I have told you all that you need to know.”

“Well then, oh wise Gandalf the Grey,” Harry said mockingly and gave a little bow of his head. “Please impart your noble wisdom, and I hope that includes some more details about the crappy little game I’m stuck in and where you’ve put my wand.”

“Your wand is right here, Harry,” Dumbledore said and reached into his purple and silver robes, pulling out Harry’s gleaming wand. “I must admit, I am curious that you were given this wand and I was not informed.”

“Why would you care about my wand?” Harry asked as he snatched the wand from Dumbledore’s fingers, inspecting it closely as if he suspected it had been tampered with but Dumbledore acted as if he hadn’t heard the question.

“Now, as for the tournament, the First Task will be held on November the twenty-fourth,” Dumbledore said briskly. “You will not know what the task entails, but I can tell you that it will be a test of your bravery and skill under pressure. As per the rules, you may bring only yourself and your wand.”

“Whoa,” Harry yawned, blinking languidly. “I’m scared already.”

“Now, I have taken the liberty of moving your possessions out of the private rooms you slept in last night to the Gryffindor Tower,” Dumbledore said pleasantly. “You will also find your new schoolbooks, which I took the liberty of buying for you.”

“School books?” Harry said slowly and scoffed, shaking his head in amusement. “Hey, I may be playing in your little game but I’m sure as hell not staying here at Hogwarts.”

“Oh?” Dumbledore enquired, cocking his head as his eyes twinkled. “But you must.”

“November the twenty-fourth, right?” Harry asked as he shrugged the blankets and sheets off him. “I’ll be back for the First Task then.”

“You don’t understand,” Dumbledore said. “All champions must stay within a reasonable distance of the Goblet of Fire, or else...”

“Pain,” Harry finished bitterly and sighed, thumping his hand down on the bed as he leant back. “Oh goody.”

Dumbledore, sensing an underlying river of anger in Harry, quickly brought about another subject and a smile crossed his wrinkled face as he clasped his hands together.

“Your friend, Ms Carpenter, has been very worried about you,” He said jovially, his blue eyes twinkling as Harry grunted sourly.

“She’s not my friend,” Harry muttered, turning away from the old wizard and staring out of the window, apparently absorbed in the white, fluffy clouds.

“Ah, I see,” Dumbledore said with something akin to understanding, his eyes sparkling almost mischievously. “Although, I do see to recall your mother said much the same about your father.”

Harry frowned and turned around to stare at him. A cold and stone expression crossed his face and his green eyes glinted maliciously as he leaned forward, his voice barely a whisper.

“What do you think is going to happen here?” He asked quietly and Dumbledore’s good mood evaporated as he noticed a glimmer of ancient darkness behind the teen’s eyes – although he was smart enough not to attempt Legillimency after what Severus had told him. “Do you think that I’m going to see the light, that love and friendship will prevail over the ‘darkness’ in my heart and I will forsake my ‘evil’ ways?”

Dumbledore didn’t say a word and remained silent as Harry leant forward and he inwardly shuddered as he saw a red and orange light flickering behind the green orbs, reminiscent to a blazing fire.

“I’ll tell you now. I’m not going to abandon Meciél,” Harry said softly but firmly, his voice resolute and unyielding. “I will not abandon the one being that cares for me, who might even love me, no matter what you try to offer me. So don’t hold your breath, or you just might die.”

Dumbledore blinked and suddenly it was Harry’s turn to suppress a grimace as the old wizard’s face went cold, the seemingly permanent look of joviality in the Headmaster’s eyes disappearing, the benign smile curving his lips gone. It was at that moment that Harry felt a slither of fear as he gazed at the powerful wand-wizard. Despite his seven years of instruction, he knew that there would be no way he could handle himself against this seemingly experienced and powerful man in a fair fight but he gripped his wand anyway. Of course, if it ever came down to a fight, Harry would do his best to make sure that it wasn’t fair.

Still, at this moment, he didn’t want to make an enemy out of such a powerful man, so he forced an annoyed sigh and rolled his eyes as he leant back into his bed, the intensity in his voice gone.

“That wasn’t a death threat, you idiot,” He snapped. “I meant die, as in, from lack of oxygen...because you were holding your breath. See?”

Dumbledore didn’t say anything and there was a look in his eyes as if he knew what Harry had just thought about him as he relaxed, the tension leaving his body as fast as it come and the benign smile curving his lips once more.

“You’ll find, Harry, that I am able to hold my breath for quite some time,” said Dumbledore, his voice rich with humour. “It’s a good trait to have for a man in my position.

“Oh, just go away already,” Harry muttered and looked away from the Headmaster, avoiding those twinkling blue eyes. Despite his rude tone, Dumbledore nodded and stood up from his seat.

“Very well, Harry, I will depart,” Dumbledore said cordially but a note of warning went into his voice as he continued. “But first, I must caution you in revealing your true status to other people. I trust that Ms Carpenter and Professor Carpenter will remain silent, however, others may not and such a revelation could shake the foundations of the Wizarding World.”

“I care because?” Harry prompted slowly.

“Because when our society becomes upset, the masses demand a scapegoat,” Dumbledore explained quietly. “You would become that scapegoat, Harry, and despite your...allegiances...I would not want to see you in Azkaban.”

He turned and walked out of the room, leaving Harry alone as he frowned in thought. But he didn’t get to think very long as he received his next visitor.

“Harry!” called out Amanda, a beaming smile on her face as she walked in. She was dressed in her crimson Salem robes and she had tied her blonde hair into a ponytail, which swayed behind her back as she took Dumbledore’s former seat. “I was worried about you. When

you didn't come back from that room, everybody thought that they had arrested you or something. But Dumbledore told us all at breakfast that you were still here and that the magical contract had hurt you because you had tried to leave the tournament, which actually surprised Ron and Neville, you know."

"Amanda, I have two questions," Harry said quickly when Amanda stopped talking to take a breath. "One, do you ever shut up? Two, why are you here?"

"The answer to question one is, I try not to," Amanda answered easily. "And the answer to number two is, you're my friend, Harry, and you're in the hospital wing so why do you think I'm here?"

"I hate to burst your bubble, brat, but we're not friends," Harry said firmly.

"Whatever you say, Harry," Amanda said slowly, rolling her eyes with a smile on her face and Harry let out a soft growl of annoyance.

He thumped his pillow and looked around at the hospital wing, then down at himself.

"So, do you think I get out of here now?" He muttered sourly.

"I'll go ask Madame Promfrey," Amanda said as she slid out of her seat. "I don't think she'll say no."

Although the nurse had been strictly adamant on keeping Harry in the bed and had told Amanda as much, it was only ten minutes later that Harry was out of bed and out of the hospital wing, walking down one of Hogwarts's long corridors with Amanda by his side.

"It's this way," She said as she gestured down on the corridors and Harry followed her without another word, looking decidedly uncomfortable in his hospital gown. At least his butt wasn't showing.

"Professor Dumbledore moved stuff into the Gryffindor tower since we're staying there from now on," Amanda continued.

Harry nodded shortly as Amanda led him through the castle, turning at several different hallways and corridors. They passed gleaming suits of armour and large, magical portraits with dozing or chattering wizards and witches and several students, who eyed Harry curiously as he stalked past them with an annoyed expression on his face.

Eventually, Amanda led him towards the end of a corridor, where a large portrait hung up on the wall. The occupant of the portrait was a fat lady dressed in pink, ruffled clothes, and she stared down at the two of them curiously.

“Harry, this is the Fat Lady, she’s the guardian of the Gryffindor dorms,” Amanda told Harry, who tutted loudly with a reproachful look on his face.

“It’s not nice to call people fat!” He said, shaking his head sadly. “Just because you’re relatively skinny doesn’t mean we all are. You have no consideration for others, do you?”

“You’re funny,” Amanda said sarcastically, rolling her eyes and facing the portrait. “Just hysterical. Balderdash.”

“What did you just call me?” Harry asked, blinking in surprise. “Because it hurt, brat, it really cut deep.”

“It’s the password, Harry,” Amanda said patiently. “Which you have to tell the Fat Lady if you want to get past.”

Harry turned around and saw that the portrait had silently and smoothly swung forward, revealing a round hole in the wall. He frowned and walked forward, entering the Gryffindor Common room for the first time.

The common room was a cosy, round room full of squashy armchairs. The walls had been painted in a warm, crimson colour and a large banner with some kind of golden lion imprinted on it hung from the ceilings. Several fireplaces flickered with gentle flames and a window box was nestled in the wall, below a large window that showed the

spectacular view of Hogwarts. Sitting in many of the armchairs were students, ranged from eleven years old to seventeen years old, and they all stared at him with a mixture of fascination and curiosity, as if he were some kind of animal from the zoo.

“Where’s my stuff?” Harry asked Amanda softly, who gestured to one of the staircases at the other side of the room.

“That’s the boy’s fourth-year dorm,” She said, shrugging her shoulders. “I suppose it’s up there.”

Harry nodded and walked forward, dodging around chairs and books as he moved across the room. As he did so, the eyes followed him unblinkingly and he let out a sigh of irritation, whirling around just before the staircase with a beaming smile on his face.

“Hey, who wants me to do a magic trick?” He asked cheerfully, although his eyes glinted with annoyance.

“What is it?” Asked one of the first years, a pigtailed dark-haired little girl.

“Watch this,” Harry said and gestured grandly to himself. “Now you see me...”

And at that he turned around and stormed up the staircase and moving out of view from the common room. At the top, he faced a stout, wooden door and turned his head, his smile gone.

“And now you don’t! Let’s keep it that way, okay?” He called out, before he opened the door and entered the room.

The first thing he noticed was the row of large poster beds, covered completely in colours of gold and red. He frowned as he swept his gaze up and down the row, seeing both Ron and Neville sitting on one of the beds. They had been talking to each other over opened books, although Ron looked extremely reluctant to be there, but when Harry entered they both stopped and stared at him.

“That’s your bed there,” Neville said quietly, the mousy-haired boy pointing to the bed at the far corner of the room.

Harry nodded and looked around the room with disinterest, letting a yawn escape his lips as he walked over to his bed and drew back the curtains. On the covers of the bed were all of his belongings. This included all of his clothing, which seemed to have been washed and ironed, his sword- which was still bundled up firmly in the scabbard, and the rest of his loose items, including keys and his wallet.

“Did somebody wash my clothes?” Harry murmured out loud, a curious frown on his face. He was also quite surprised that the Hogwarts staff had let him keep the sword, especially considering that Dumbledore knew of his true status.

“It was probably the House-elves,” Neville supplied helpfully from across the other side of the room. “They’re the ones who brought your stuff in.”

‘House-elves?’ Harry thought in curiosity.

‘A servant class of the wand-wizards,’ Meciél supplied. ‘They are used for most kinds of menial labour. They are powerful in their own right, but they hold no candle to a wizard with a wand, which was why they were subjugated and tamed long ago. A house-elf wouldn’t dare touch a wizard’s belongings, which is probably why your sword is still there.’

Harry nodded at both Neville and Meciél as he stepped into the curtains and pulled them across. With a single deft movement, Harry tore off his hospital gown and dressed himself up in his normal clothes. If they hadn’t given back his robes, then he would wear whatever the hell he wanted to. After he was done, he made sure to carefully hide the sword under his covers and opened up the curtains.

When he appeared again, both Ron and Neville started at the sight of him.

“Er...why aren't you wearing your robes?” Neville asked carefully.

“Don't have any,” Harry replied with a grunt as he thumbed through a small but thick book of parchment that was entitled ‘Rules of the Noblest Tri-Wizardian Tournament’.

Silence filled the room as Harry started reading, while Ron and Neville glanced at each other nervously. Finally, Ron had the courage to speak to the enigmatic and, so far, mean and cruel teenager.

“So...” He started slowly. “How did you get Dumbledore's age line?”

“I didn't,” Harry answered distractedly as he browsed through the rules, frowning at the manner and style of writing. When the hell had this been written, in the Roman Times? He let out an annoyed sigh as he flipped the page, staring in incomprehension at the words.

‘Allow me to help, beloved,’ Meciél offered and suddenly Harry felt a small spark of warmth in his mind. When he glanced back down at the page it was covered in different words.

‘What's this?’

‘I am merely translating the text into phrases and sentences that are easier for you to comprehend,’ Meciél said.

‘Neat.’

‘Thankyou, beloved.’

“Well, if you didn't get past the age-line then how did you get your name in the Goblet?” Ron asked curiously. “Did you get an adult to put it in there for you?”

“No, I didn't,” Harry snapped and glared up from the book. “I didn't put my name in the Goblet and I didn't ask somebody to put my name in the Goblet. Hell, I don't even want to be here right now. Alright? “

“Right,” Ron answered quickly, although he sounded unconvinced. But when Harry looked up again, irritation on his face and a glitter of anger in his eyes, he gulped and hastily turned away, the tips of his ears burning.

Neville cleared his throat nervously and quickly looked at a small piece of parchment. His eyes widened and he nudged Ron with his elbow, gesturing down.

“ Oh Ron, we have to go!” He said quickly. “We’ve got Transfiguration in a few minutes.”

Harry blinked as the two boys hastily packed up their books and strode from the room, leaving him alone. He frowned in thought and rummaged through his own pockets, picking up the timetable that McGonagall had given him yesterday. Sure enough, he was also scheduled for Transfiguration.

‘You should attend, beloved,’ Meciell advised. ‘The Professor could offer you some insight in this subject that we both lack. After all, Transfiguration can be a powerful weapon if used correctly, that much I know.’

“Oh goodie,” Harry muttered but he stood up and threw the book down on his bed. “I get to go to school again.”

Harry followed Ron and Neville to Transfiguration, unconcerned or just plain apathetic at the number of speculative glances, looks of interests, frowns of disapproval or even scowls of anger he received from the tide of students, all of whom were rushing to get to their classes. When he stepped into the classroom, he was met with a sea of stares but he ignored them as he strode through the room and took a seat at one of the empty tables.

“Mr Potter,” Professor McGonagall said from the front of the room, frowning severely at him. “Where are your proper Hogwarts robes?”

“No idea,” Harry said, shrugging and giving her a clueless look. “It was either this or the hospital gown, and while I admit that the gown

showed off my spectacular body, I just didn't think it was fair for the other boys in the class- you know, envy is sin."

"That will be fifteen points from Gryffindor for your cheek," McGonagall said sternly and her iron-like gaze ran over the classroom, stilling the mutters and giggles before they had even started. "I suggest you watch your mouth, Mr Potter, and I suggest you find the proper school clothes for next lesson."

Harry shrugged again and sat back as McGonagall ruffled around at her desk for something. She found it and clasping a piece of parchment in her hand; she walked across the classroom and stood over Harry's desk.

"This is a series of theoretical questions that I have taken from a series of past examinations," McGonagall instructed briskly. "You are to remain quiet as you answer them and you are not allowed to ask any of your classmates for help. Afterwards, I'll run you through a small practical demonstration."

Harry nodded sourly as he took the piece of parchment from McGonagall's hands and glanced over it. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out a pen and began to read through the questions.

'Meciel, what's the Third Law of Inanimate Transfiguration?'

'The mass of a pre-transfigured object has to be similar, although not identical, mass to the post-transfigured object, if it is to remain in a stable physical state,' Meciel said evenly. 'I thought the Professor instructed you not to cheat?'

'You're not a classmate, are you?'

'Technically, I am,' Meciel answered in amusement. 'I am here to learn as much as you are.'

'Well, why don't you go and tell on me then?' Harry replied lightly and was awarded with an insincere huff from Meciel. A smile curved

his lips and he bent down and started scrawling the answer to the question.

Some time later, when McGonagall had already tasked the class to some sort of transfiguration involving mice, Harry threw down his pen and glanced up from his completed worksheet. A moment later, McGonagall came over and picked it up, scanning over the answers with well-practised ease.

“Well, Mr Potter,” She said in a no-nonsense tone. “You seem to have an excellent grasp on transfiguration theory.”

“Not really,” Harry admitted lazily with a small smile. “I have something like a photographic memory. I don’t actually know what most of the crap I just wrote down means.”

“Five points for language, Mr Potter,” McGonagall said absently, frowning in thought. “How are you for practical work?”

“I can turn a match into a needle,” Harry answered slowly, but he was frowning in hesitation.

McGonagall raised an eyebrow, staring down at the boy in front of her, and nodded.

“Very well,” She said. “Show me.”

With a short wave of her wand, a match materialised from nothingness on Harry’s desk. Harry frowned and reached into his dark overcoat. He grasped his wand and brought it out, hovering it over the match. With narrowed eyes and a focussed look, Harry jabbed his wand at the matchstick.

The match shimmered in an almost-silver colour and for a moment Harry had thought he had done it. But the shimmer suddenly flashed red and black and the match hissed and spluttered as it was consumed with flames, turning into a small pile of ash in a matter of moments. A loud crack filled the room, driving McGonagall back in surprise and gaining the attention of the entire class.

McGonagall stared at him severely as Harry shrugged, putting his wand back into his clothes with an untroubled expression on his face.

“Yeah, it tends to do that sometimes,” He explained slowly, a puzzled frown on his face as he stared at the tiny pile of ashes. “I could never really get that.”

“Well then, Mr Potter,” McGonagall said sternly. “I believe it is back to the basics for you.”

She handed him a thick tome and Harry frowned as he glanced at the title, ‘Transfiguration for the advanced beginner.’

“You will read that and summarise chapter one to me in a fifteen inch scroll,” McGonagall instructed briskly. “I expect it to be handed back to me at the start of the next class.”

“Ah, yeah, about that,” Harry said slowly, shaking his head. “I’ll read the book but I’m not writing out a stupid essay.”

“Excuse me, Mr Potter?” McGonagall asked softly, her voice thick with disbelief, and the class quietened, many staring at Harry as if he were an idiot. “What did you just say?”

“I have more important things to do,” Harry answered honestly, a small smile curving his lips as he saw McGonagall’s face harden with anger.

“That will be twenty points from Gryffindor for your utter lack of respect,” The greying witch said icily, staring at Harry with a harsh look in her eyes. “Mr Potter, I don’t know where you attended school before Hogwarts but here we have certain expectations from our students! That includes doing your homework and showing the proper respect!”

“Look,” Harry snapped, all humour and ease in his voice gone, and the vehemence was enough to make McGonagall blink. “I may have

to play in this stupid tournament of yours, but I don't have to do the damn schoolwork."

"You will be expelled if you keep up that mentality!" McGonagall said softly, breathing heavily through her long and pointed nose, her eyes wide with anger and outrage.

"Do I look like I give a crap?" Harry replied and let a smirk cross his face. "Besides, I'm the fifth champion. You can't expel me.

McGonagall opened her mouth, her teeth gnashing together as she prepared to fiercely berate Harry, but at that exact moment a loud, clanging bell echoed throughout the castle and Harry stood up. Without another word, he strode from the room with the book clasped underneath his arm.

'That was very subtle, beloved,' Meciell said dryly.

"Everybody's a whiner," Harry muttered underneath his breath and felt Meciell's amusement as he strode through the hallways. Behind him, he suddenly heard pattering footsteps and turned around to see Amanda rushing to catch up with him.

"That was really rude of you," The blonde girl attempted to scolded, but a reluctant grin of mirth kept twitching her lips. "Though the look on her face when you walked out..."

"Why are you following me?" Harry asked her in annoyance, making her blink.

"I thought you wanted me to be close," Amanda teased him, a smile tugging her lips.

"That was when I had to save your life to fulfil my debt," Harry said slowly and made a shooing gesture with his hands. "Now I want you go to a place very far away from me and stay there."

"What if I get hurt?" Amanda asked in curiosity.

“Eh,” Harry shrugged. “I’ll send flowers.”

“So, if I was in danger and somebody was about to kill me, you wouldn’t stop them?” Amanda questioned with a frown on her face.

“It depends,” Harry said.

“On what?”

“Well, if you were in danger because you did something stupid, or if I was the person about to kill you, then no, I wouldn’t.” Harry answered easily, making Amanda blink in surprise.

“Oh,” She uttered slowly and gave a cheerful, if slightly nervous, smile. “You wouldn’t really try to kill me, would you?”

“Keep hanging around and we’ll find out,” Harry said, smiling just as widely as Amanda was.

“I’ll just go talk to Hermione then,” Amanda said quickly and turned around, walking away.

“Smart brat,” Harry muttered under his breath, before he turned around and headed back to the tower.

A few days later, Harry found himself stalking down one of Hogwarts' corridors with an ever-present Amanda at his side, a disgruntled frown on his face as he glared at student, portrait and ghosts alike. For the last two days, over the weekend, Harry had pretty much stayed in his room and had ventured out only to eat and go to the toilet. He had spent hours of his time allowing Meciél to use his body and mind to scan the rule book for the Triwizard Tournament, trying to find a safe and painless way to get out of it. She had failed.

Despite Harry's whining, Meciél had badgered him into attending one of his classes. So instead of curling up in a warm, comfortable bed and sleeping in like he usually did on Monday mornings, Harry was entering the room of his Defence against the Dark Arts class. He had received his Hogwarts robes back but decided that he preferred the feel of his normal clothes. Besides, it got a stir out of the Professors and if there was one thing Harry liked doing, it was making a scene.

"I didn't think you'd come to another class," Amanda told him brightly as he scanned the filled room for seats, a frown on his face. "Especially after what happened in Transfiguration."

"The old cripple looks like he knows what he's doing," Harry muttered half-heartedly as he strode through the room and took a seat. Much to his displeasure and a sharp, pointed look that Amanda totally ignored, the blonde girl sat down next to him.

"That's not a nice thing to say," She scolded lightly.

"Well, I'm not a nice person," Harry snapped in irritation. Amanda nodded at that as Harry looked away, his bored green eyes scanning the room and noting that Hermione, who was sitting in front of him, was eying him with a scowl on her face.

"You'd better not lose us points," She huffed and whirled around, her bushy hair obscuring Harry's view of the blackboard.

“Down in front,” Harry called out, but it was at that moment that Moody limped through the door, his wooden leg making an oddly ominous clunk with every step.

The crippled man limped to the front of the room, his magical blue eye whirling in his skull as he rubbed his grizzled chin with gnarled fingers. The entire class instantly quietened under his powerful gaze, even Harry, who held firm as the blue eye stopped spinning and focussed on him. Moody seemed to grin, an expression that twisted and mangled his scarred face even worse than usually, but the eye moved away as he cleared his throat.

“Right- I’ve had a look at what you’ve done in the previous three years and it seems that I’ve finally got you up to date,” He began roughly. “Still, Lupin gave you a decent understanding of dark creatures and Quirrell managed to stutter some of the basics into you. But you really haven’t focused on curses, have you?”

Several people in the class shook their head in response to his question and Moody frowned.

“You were meant to get touch on that topic in your second year,” He muttered gruffly. “That Lockhart was useless -but then he always was, wasn’t he?”

“Yeah,” Harry answered brightly, nodding vigorously. “He was a useless old git, that’s for sure.”

There was a soft snicker from one of the Gryffindor boys as Moody frowned, turning his eye on Harry.

“You weren’t even here, Potter,” He growled out, pinning the boy with a scowl on his face.

“Hey, I’m not one to let that stop me from insulting other people behind their back,” Harry replied and he could hear Hermione give a soft sigh in exasperation.

He ignored her as he stared back at the Professor, not in the slightest bit intimidated of the glowing blue orb. Moody kept that eye on him but he turned back to the rest of the class, his voice suddenly grim.

“This year, it’s time you finally learnt about curses,” He said quietly, but his voice captured everybody’s attention as they all sat up in their seats. “For your first lesson, I’m going to jump straight into the nastiest ones of them all, the big three. The Unforgivable Curses, some of the darkest magic in the world.”

In the seat next to Harry, Amanda let out a small shudder, but Harry perked up and suddenly interested gleamed in his eyes as he leaned forward in anticipation. In his mind, Meciél spoke up softly, curiosity also gleaning her voice.

‘I do not know these curses, beloved,’ she told him and something akin to smugness entered her tone. ‘You see, you may actually learn something of great value here. Aren’t you glad that I pressured you into coming?’

Harry ignored her as Moody continued his lesson, pacing up and down the front of the classroom with a constant series of thuds.

“Now, these curses are the Imperius Curse, the Cruciatus Curse and, of course, the Killing Curse,” The one-eyed man informed them gruffly.

Harry saw Neville shudder at the names and rolled his eyes mockingly but he paid close attention to the Professor, as quiet as the rest of the class as Moody let a nasty grin come over his face.

“Today, I will be showing you these curses and what they are capable of,” He finished thickly and the class burst out into sound, students muttering to each other in small hushed whispers.

“Professor, aren’t these curses illegal?” Hermione asked in a shocked tone, her loud voice cutting straight through the mutters as Moody stroked his grizzled chin, eying the girl with approval on his face.

“That’s right, girly,” He said, nodding fiercely. “If you use one of these curses on a human being, they’ll chuck you into Azkaban and let you rot there for the rest of your life. Still, Dumbledore thinks that it’s better that you learn about them in a classroom instead of in a back alley with a dark wizard scum eying you down the length of his wand!”

“Still...” Hermione protested weakly, appearing startled at the old man’s vehemence, but Harry frowned.

“Hey, kill-joy!” He snapped loudly and Hermione whirled around, her hesitancy gone as she glared at him furiously. “Why don’t you shut up and let the man teach?”

Hermione huffed at him but she fell silent as she turned around.

Moody raised his wand and whipped it through the air at something on his desk. Without a single word being uttered, a small, white sheet flew off a table and billowed out onto the ground, revealing three small glass jars. Each of the jars contained a black hairy spider and Harry saw Ron shudder at the sight of them, unconsciously leaning away from the jars, and made a mental note to bring it up in the redhead’s company later on.

Moody took the first glass jar and opened it up, holding it over his desk and tapping on the back. The spider dropped to the polished mahogany and scuttled away but a small careless wave of Moody’s wand and what Harry recognised as the summoning charm was enough to yank the spider back to the table. Moody quick jabbed his wand at it, his face intent and his eyes gleaming, and barked:

“Imperio!”

The spider suddenly started dancing on the table, moving faster and faster as it launched into a complicated rhythm of tapping and bobbing. The rest of the class started giggling and laughing; one of the boys pointing at the spider with a roaring smile on his face, but Harry was silent. He had felt the recoil of that curse from Moody’s

wand, a flash of icy-cold magic reeking with dark power, flowing with malevolence and an overpowering need to dominate, to control.

“Think its funny, do you?” Moody asked quietly, and the class quieted down, several smiles dimming at his blazing face. “I could make this spider do anything. I could make it jump out of the window, I could make it crawl across the table, burrow into your stomachs and lay its eggs in you, I could make it go home and brutally murder its family.”

The class was quiet, the humour gone.

“The Imperius Curse gives total control over a person to the caster,” Moody told them quietly. “If it’s left on the person for too long, it can damage their mind to the point of no recovery. There are a lot of people in Saint Mungo because of this curse. However, it can be fought, and I’ll be teaching you how to do that in a later class.”

‘That curse would be most useful,’ Meciél said speculatively.

‘It would,’ Harry agreed.

“For this next curse, it needs to be a bit bigger,” Moody said and swished his wand at the spider. “Engorgio!”

The spider twitched and it suddenly swelled up in size, until it was the size of Harry’s fist. Harry frowned at the spell but his lips twitched as he saw Ron abandoning all pretence of bravery and scooting back on his seat, a nervous expression on his face. The amused look on his face vanished as Moody jabbed his wand and snarled out an incantation.

“Crucio!” The grizzled old man spat out, and Harry almost started in shock as a blast of pure dark emotions slammed into his ultra-sensitive mind.

Suddenly he was overwhelmed by a bloodthirsty urge to cause pain, to enjoy pain, to main and torture. His finger’s convulsed in something like ecstasy as a wave of pleasure swept through him, alien to his

own feelings. It was these sorts of feelings that gave power to the darkened denizens of Hell and the furthest reaches of the Nevernever, and for a moment Meciél, and by extension Harry, felt something that could only be described as a flicker of intense bliss. The spider started jerking madly, flailing and tossing on the desk as its legs collapsed and it fell down with a small thump. Although it had no mouth and no voice, Harry could almost hear its scream of pure agony as he leant forward, his eyes wide and glinting with an inner fiery darkness.

Although Harry could claim that he was enjoying the show, the rest of the class felt otherwise. The boys were watching with pale faces, Neville in particular was shaking uncontrollably as he stared at the spider with a haunted gaze. Several of the girls, including Amanda, had put their hands over their mouths, horrified expressions on their face.

After that brief moment, Meciél clamped down on her advanced senses and Harry was suddenly himself again. Ignoring the heightened rush of adrenaline and endorphins in his veins, Harry glanced at the blonde girl next to him and gave a soft sigh of exasperation as he saw her widened and almost tearful eyes.

Moody broke off the curse and the spider dropped to the table, still trembling and twitching as it passively lay there. The entire class was silent, including Harry, as they all stared at their Professor with wide eyes.

“The Cruciatus Curse,” Moody said quietly “The ultimate pain curse and one of the most powerful pieces of dark magic in history. Long ago it was my duty to hunt down and capture, or kill, anybody who used this on another human being. I’d do it again today.”

‘You must learn that curse, beloved, I insist!’ Meciél said into Harry’s mind, her voice tinted with longing.

‘So this is your coffee?’ Harry asked in amusement and Meciél was silent.

Moody turned back to spider, raising his wand with a strangely hollow and intent expression on his face. Harry saw Hermione shudder and bury her face in her hands and knew that the small creature wouldn't survive this next curse.

“Avada Kedavra!”

A bright flash of green light filled the room and a rushing noise blasted into Harry's eardrums, as if a vast, large invisible something was soaring through the air. A coil of sickly green magic, moving too fast for Harry to get a proper look at, shot forward and suddenly the spider was on its back, unmistakably dead. An almost intoxicating scent of death and decay filled Harry's nostrils and he felt Meciél shudder again before she distanced herself from Harry's senses.

Harry watched with a blank face but his eyes glinted as he hid both a shudder of both pleasure and a shudder of pain. With Meciél's help, Harry had been able to drag up the memory of his parents deaths- of his mother screaming to the dark-cloaked and crimson eyed figure to spare his life only to be cut down, of the figure turning his wand upon Harry and suddenly screaming, vapourising underneath a bright flash of green light. He had watched the memories once and only once and had promptly buried them afterwards, refusing to speak about them with even Meciél.

“The Killing Curse,” Moody said quietly. “It's one of the most potent curses to have ever been created. It needs a fair amount of magic behind it for it to work. You could all point your wands at me right now and yell the words and I doubt I would get so much as a nose bleeds.” “

“Is that a challenge? Did that sound like a challenge to you?” Harry muttered, forcing his memories away as he reverted back to the most comfortable thing he knew of- insulting people. Amanda eyed him incredulously as he continued. “Because I think I could take him. I mean, he's old and crippled and I'm young and vigorous.”

Moody either hadn't noticed Harry's muttering and Amanda's splutter or had ignored as he continued, his face grim.

“There’s no magical counter, no shield spell that can block it, no counter-curse to reverse it. When a witch or wizard is hit with this curse, they die,” Moody said softly and his magical eye spun around to zoom in on Harry. “There’s only been one known survivor to the curse and he’s sitting here in front of me.”

The class turned to look at Harry, who eyed them back with a deadly look in his eyes. Most of them hastily and wisely turned away but Amanda placed a comforting hand on his shoulder, a sympathetic expression on her face. Harry almost jumped at the contact and eyed the hand like it was a diseased rat, an expression of distaste on his face.

“What the hell are you doing?” He muttered coldly.

Amanda was saved from answering him as somebody knocked loudly on the door and a slight boy in Gryffindor robes and a beaming smile on his face entered the room.

“Professor Moody,” He called out chirpily. “I’m here to collect Harry Potter.”

“Tournament business?” Moody asked with a grunt.

“A wand-weighing, Professor, whatever that is,” The boy answered and his eyes flickered over at Harry with something like adoration in them.

“Potter, you’re dismissed,” Moody growled and waved Harry off. “I’d assign you homework but after your little tantrum in McGonagall’s class, I doubt you’d do it.”

Harry shrugged off Amanda’s hand and stood up, letting a mischievous smirk cross his face.

“Moral of the story, act like a spoiled brat and you can get what you want,” Harry shot back and before Moody could reply, he had walked out of the room with the small boy trailing after him.

Outside the room, Harry wordlessly gestured at the boy to move and trailed after him as the brown-haired Gryffindor led him down a flight of stairs and through a series of corridors. Harry was content to keep quiet but the boy wasn't and a second later, he started talking.

"I'm Colin," The boy said suddenly and stopped with a beaming smile on his face, stretching out his hand.

Harry glanced from Colin's face to the hand and then back again, looking clearly unimpressed and disinterested.

"I really don't care," He said flatly and the boy flushed, lowering his hand hurriedly. Still, the almost fanatical look of adoration stuck in the boy's eyes as he stared at Harry intently.

"You're the boy-who-lived," He breathed quietly. "That's so cool."

"No, I'm the girl who lived," Harry replied sarcastically and gave a beaming smile as Colin started in shock. He gestured to his robes, planting a serious expression on his face. "They hide my breasts well, don't they?"

Colin stared at him, blinking in surprise, before he suddenly let out a loud and high-pitch laugh.

"That's a funny joke, Harry," He said between giggles.

Harry shook his head in disgust and let out an annoyed sigh as he began to walk faster. Colin had to rush up to catch up to the fifth champion as they turned the corner, Colin leading him past a series of dusty portraits.

"So you're the fifth champion," Colin said after a few minutes of silence. "Is it cool?"

Harry turned his head and stared at Colin intently, something dark glinting in his gaze and Colin fidgets under the stare.

“What are you doing Harry?” The brown-haired boy asked nervously.

“I’m trying to see if I can kill you with my mind,” Harry answered calmly.

Colin laughed again but this time it was filled with uncertainty. He stopped laughing as he saw Harry’s serious expression, gulped and edged away from Harry. He began to walk faster and Harry let out a pleased smile as the two of them approached an oak door, and without another word Harry opened it the door and stepped into the room.

He was in a fairly small classroom but most of the desks had been pushed away to the back of the room, leaving a large space in the middle. Three of the desks had been covered with a purple velvet cloth and behind them were six chairs. Sitting in these chairs were the officials of the tournament, Crouch with his tired eyes and stern face, Bagman with his brilliant smile, Karkaroff and his icy cold eyes, Maxime, who loomed above all the others and Molly, who eyed Harry carefully, her face blank.

Standing next to the chairs was a witch with blonde hair, rigid curls and way too much makeup. She wore jewelled spectacles and clutched a sleek crocodile-skinned handbag to her arm. Her gaze flickered to Harry as soon as he entered the door and something akin to a predatory light entered her eyes as she darted forward.

“Harry Potter, charmed to meet you,” She said quickly, grasping his unwilling hand and giving it a tight squeeze as she shook it fiercely. “Rita Skeeter, Daily Prophet, come on, let’s have a few words over there, shall we?”

Harry blinked as Rita ushered him aside, scowling at her prodding as she directed him into a corner of the classroom. His hand flew to his wand and his eyes glinted angrily, but as he prepared to do something horrible to this woman, she stopped and whirled around, a notebook and bright green quill suddenly appearing in her hands.

“ So Harry, what made you decide to enter the Triwizard tournament?” She rattled off quickly, making Harry blink.

“I didn't enter it,” Harry snapped out angrily, but he stopped as he cocked his head at the quill, which was scrawling rapidly across the notebook without any direction by Rita, who frowned.

“You can tell us the truth, Harry,” She said encouragingly. “Was it the gold? The fame? Are you trying to do your parents proud?”

“Er...my parents are dead,” Harry said slowly. “The last time I checked, rotting corpses couldn't feel pride.”

“You speak of your parents as if you hate them,” Rita muttered shrewdly. “Do you hate your parents, Harry? Are you disappointed that they died? What about your Uncle and Aunt? Are you sad that they died? What happened? How did they die, Harry?”

“ Er...” Harry started, more bemused than angry- although his annoyance was rising as Rita prattled, almost as if she didn't care what he said.

“Why is Dumbledore blocking the Ministry from starting an inquiry into the death of your guardians? What manner of dark magic was used to kill your relatives? How did you escape the attack?” Rita rattled off and her quill sped up as Harry stared at her, his ire high as he clutched his wand. A curse was at the tip of his tongue as hellfire burned into his wand, small coils of smoke rising from the glowing runes, when somebody cleared their throat and Rita darted around.

“ Professor Dumbledore,” She exclaimed sweetly, although her notebook and quill had vanished as quick as they had come. “How nice to see you again.”

“ Ms Skeeter,” Dumbledore said pleasantly, his eyes twinkling behind his half-moon glasses. “I am sorry to cut, but we are in need of our fifth champion.”

“Of course,” Rita said charmingly, but there was an undercurrent of annoyance in her voice as she gave her a forced bright smile. “Another time then, Harry.”

“Don't count on it,” Harry muttered under his breath as the witch strode across the room and began chatting with Bagman. He didn't look at Dumbledore, who stood next to him silently, but his next words were for the old man. “Does she know how close she came to dying a painful and horrible death?”

“It is unlikely,” Dumbledore said lightly, but warningly as he continued. “I suppose it is for the best, though. I would have not enjoyed stopping and restraining you – for your own good, of course. Assault is not a subject to be taken lightly.”

“She better be glad you came along when you did,” Harry grumbled and he hid his apprehension over the older wizard's not-so-subtle warning. From what he had sensed and heard, Dumbledore was not a wizard he would want to make an enemy of unless he was standing over the old man when he was asleep with a sword in his hands. “I was about to blast her with Hellfire. She's a twit of a woman, you know?”

“Yes, I do know how you feel,” Dumbledore said and smiled jovially. “Why, just last week she called me a doddering old man who was reaching his senile years. I naturally took offence at that- I reached my senile years some time ago.”

“Right,” Harry said slowly, and then frowned as something occurred to him. “She said that you were keeping the Ministry away from me. Why?”

“There are a number of answers for that question, Harry,” Dumbledore answered quietly. “For starters, I do not believe that you need the bureaucracy of the Ministry of Magic hassling you at this particular time, with the pressures of the Triwizard tournament. Furthermore, I can guarantee a certain measure of protection here at Hogwarts that I cannot at a Ministry of Magic prison cell. Finally, I did not want them running a comprehensive scan of you and discovering

your...invisible friend, so to say, and taking her away from you by force.”

“Really?” Harry asked softly, surprise laced in his voice as the two of them started striding back to the middle of the room.

“From what I have learnt of your kind, I understand that you need to give up your coin willingly if you are ever to be free,” Dumbledore answered, his voice sombre, and Harry felt an animalistic burst of anger flare up inside of him.

“I’ll never give it up!” Harry hissed menacingly, his eyes glinting with dark power. At the first sign of hostility, Dumbledore whipped his head around and his light-blue eyes met Harry’s angry green. There was no twinkle, no look of joviality and for a second Harry saw something behind the kindly Headmaster persona- a deep seated and slumbering power that far outstretched his own. Harry was the first to look away as he cleared his throat, suddenly wary and uncomfortable of the man in front of him.

‘Did I not advise against antagonising this man?’ Meciél warned. ‘He possesses great power, beloved- He may be one of the strongest Wand-Wizards on this planet. Please be wary around him, and do say thank you.’

Harry scowled but grudgingly obeyed.

“Thank you,” He muttered sourly. “From me and Meciél.”

“You’re welcome,” Dumbledore replied brightly, no sign of the hardened aspects of his personality on his face as he led Harry back to the table with twinkling eyes.

The Headmaster took a seat with the other five and Harry sat down on a chair near the door with the other four contestants. Both Richard, the Salem contestant, and Cedric, gave him neutral nods of greeting. Krum gave him an almost-broody glower as he stared at Harry darkly, while Fleur sniffed haughtily, her disdain for Harry quite apparent on her face. Harry made a face back and Fleur twitched in anger, much to the amusement of the Denarian host.

'She does seem to have a problem with your presence,' Meciél noted thoughtfully.

'Who cares?' Harry thought back derisively as he gave Fleur a mocking smile. 'She's just a rich, spoiled daddy's-girl.'

Harry could feel Meciél's amusement as he focussed his eyes around the room, and suddenly he gave a start of surprise as he recognised the man leaning quietly against the window. It was the same silver eyed and white haired man who had sold him his wand all those years ago. For a split second, Ollivander's eyes met Harry's and the latter gave the former a pointed look.

Ollivander inclined his head in answer to Harry's unspoken question, barely a fraction but enough so Harry was sure that the vow of silence the man had made would still be applicable here. He relaxed a smidgen as Dumbledore cleared his throat.

“Ms Delacour, if you could please present your wand?”

One by one, the participants of the Triwizard tournament presented their wands to the silvery-eyed wandmaker, who seemed to inspect them carefully. Harry was barely paying attention to the actual process as he alternated between glowering back at Krum and making faces at Fleur, the former whose mood just darkened and the latter who huffed and looked away, her beautiful face showing annoyance and irritation. When it was his turn, he jumped out of his seat and strolled up.

“You break it and I'll break you,” He said cheerfully but there was a look of wariness and warning in his eye as he handed his wand over.

Ollivander accepted it almost gingerly as he handled the wand carefully, examining it in great detail. A brief flitter of surprise flickered over his face as he ran his thumb over the elaborately carved runes in the wand.

“Holly, eleven inches and phoenix feather, nice and supple,” Ollivander murmured.

Out of the corner of Harry’s eye he could have sworn Dumbledore had started, but when he turned his head and looked the Headmaster was merely watching the proceedings with a pleasant face.

“These runes...interesting, very interesting,” Ollivander murmured thoughtfully as he inspected them. The old man inclined his head and widened his eyes and suddenly a small but noticeable shudder ran through him as he stared at the wand unblinkingly.

Harry frowned in confusion but suddenly comprehension dawned on him. The wandmaker was using his Third Sight to see the true magical nature of the wand and runes. He let out a small malicious smirk as Ollivander shuddered again. Hellfire was a potent but darkened energy source, rent with hatred, anger and the other dark desires of the human mind. Harry’s wand, which channeled Hellfire every single day, would radiate these emotions, making it very painful to view under Third Sight.

Ollivander suddenly winced and broke his gaze on the wand, blinking rapidly. Most of the occupants in the room stared at him in puzzlement, but Dumbledore seemed to have recognized what had happened and had an expression of concern on his face as he stood up and quickly strode across the room.

“I am fine, Albus,” Ollivander muttered before Dumbledore had even opened his mouth and he turned his silvery gaze back onto Harry. “These runes allow you to amplify your magic from an alternate power source, correct?”

Harry nodded slowly as Ollivander continued his inspection of the wand, twirling it between his long and spindly fingers and letting a shower of dark red and black sparks shoot through the air.

“I would say that you have trouble with the delicate type of magic, but you can summon fire and other potent curses almost effortlessly.” Ollivander concluded breezily.

“Actually, yeah,” Harry said slowly, eying Ollivander strangely.

“Will that be a problem?” Dumbledore asked quietly. “Can this wand be used to compete in the tournament?”

“Oh yes, I am sure that Mr. Potter will give off a spectacular performance,” Ollivander answered. “But do not expect anything related to subtlety with this wand.”

“Indeed?” Dumbledore murmured softly, his eyes flickering over Harry carefully.

Ollivander leant in closer until Harry could practically taste him. An aged and dusty smell filled his nostrils as Ollivander breathed against his ear, his voice dropping down to a fraction of a whisper.

“This wand was not designed to channel Hellfire. There will be large branches of magic you will not be able to delve in using this wand, or indeed, any other,” Ollivander murmured quietly and quickly. “Unless you forsake the Fallen, your magic will forever become amplified with Hellfire, rendering all normal wands useless.”

“Can’t you make a wand that can handle Hellfire?” Harry asked back, just as quietly as Ollivander had been. Dumbledore eyed the pair of them carefully but didn’t intrude as he stepped back.

“No,” Ollivander murmured. “It would be impossible.”

“So I’ll never get Transfiguration?” Harry asked and let a small smirk of victory cross his face. “That’s what I told her.”

‘You told me that because you were too lazy to study, beloved,’ Meciél said amusedly.

“A win is a win,” Harry told Ollivander smugly, who looked at him strangely but straightened up and spoke up in a louder tone.

“It will always take more effort and concentration from you to use delicate magics, but with practice and patience you might be able to obtain an average skill,” He finished and handed Harry back his wand.

“Oh, you just had to say that,” Harry grumbled in annoyance. “That’s what she says. “

“Not a win after all, Mr Potter?” asked Dumbledore from behind him and Harry whirled around, startled at the sight of the old man so close to him.

“Don’t do that!” He snapped angrily.

“I apologise,” Dumbledore said sincerely, but with a twinkle of amusement in his eyes.

“Yeah, you’re real sorry,” Harry muttered and glanced around. “Is there anything else or can I go and devour the soul of that cute Hufflepuff girl I saw on my way here”

“Photos!” Rita burst out quickly as Dumbledore frowned at Harry warningly.

“Eh, no,” Harry declared flatly. “I don’t do photos, dancing or sock puppets.”

“Sock puppets?” Cedric muttered to Richard.

“But...” Rita started but Harry didn’t hear the rest of the protest as he strode across the room, opened the door and left. Outside in the corridor, Harry strode down the hallway, glancing at his wand with a frown.

“I suppose there’s a disadvantage to every relationship,” He muttered as he tucked his wand back into his jacket.

‘I had suspected that something like this could be possible,’ Meciél told him quietly. ‘Still, the benefits of Hellfire far outweigh the benefits of Transfiguration.’

“So, now what,” Harry asked after a moment’s silence as he started making his way back to the Gryffindor tower. The Defence against the Dark Arts lesson was going to finish in less than ten minutes anyway.

‘I believe you know what to do,’ Meciél said and Harry groaned.

“Practise, practise, practise, it gets boring, you know?” Harry complained.

‘First beloved, I demand that you search out the library for anything relating to these ‘Unforgivables’” Meciél said and there was an odd note of eagerness in her voice as Harry hesitated.

“I don’t think we’re going to find them in a school library, Meciél,” He complained but he turned around and started walking to the library. “Still, if it gets me out of Transfiguration, then what the hell.”

Over the next few days, Harry, at Meciél's prodding, grudgingly practised his meagre Transfiguration skills. With Meciél's extraordinary ability to memorise and process entire slabs of text and Harry's naturally quick mind, within a few days of constant practise Harry had actually made some progress. Of course, he still blew up his matchstick every so often, but this time it was more charcoal instead of cinders.

'It is as I said, beloved,' Meciél said smugly as Harry stared at a glinting silver needle. 'With practise and patience, your skills can only improve.'

'Yeah, yeah,' Harry muttered sullenly. 'Now, can we go and work on something fun?'

'Not just yet, beloved. First, I believe it is time you went back to the library and searched for more texts about these so-called "Unforgivable Curses"'

Harry sighed but closed the thick Transfiguration tome and left the small and disused classroom, rolling his eyes in boredom as he strode towards the library.

Whenever Meciél wasn't badgering him into studying or practising, she was pressing him into attending the classes that Hogwarts offered. As always, Harry bowed down before Meciél's will and attended some of his classes. He kept up with Defence against the Dark Arts, finding Moody to be an excellent source of knowledge. He had tried a few lessons in Charms but found that the class was focussing on summoning and banishing charms, something he had mastered a long time ago. Sometimes he went to Transfiguration and sometimes he didn't. In any case, Harry ignored McGonagall's attempts to discipline him until he thought that the stern witch wanted to raise her wand at him out of pure frustration.

But after a few days, Dumbledore must have issued a warning to all of the Professors, because despite Harry's bad moods, disruptive behaviour and scathing tongue, they stopped trying to discipline him and asking him to complete homework, much to the bitterness of his

classmates and the disapproval of Hermione, who frowned at him every time she saw him. As long as Harry remained silent and unobtrusive in the class, the Professor's tended to ignore Harry, which suited him fine. He generally spent most of the lesson idly gazing out of the window while Meciél paid close attention to all of the lessons.

Much to his annoyance, Amanda still chose to hang around him. Despite Harry's snappy attitude and constant belittling, the blonde girl seemed to either have a resolve of steel or a brain full of air and the insults merely bounced off her. He soon learned to tune her annoyingly chattering voice out of his head and focus on other more important things, like getting the dark speck from under his fingernails.

Meciél may have forced him to continue learning the new and, to Harry, boring magic of Hogwarts, there were some areas that the teen wouldn't budge on and Harry found himself disagreeing with her as she tried to make him interact with the students, more specifically, the potentially useful and powerful students.

It was at least a week after Harry had first arrived at Hogwarts when he decided to attend one of the Care of Magical Creatures classes. As usually, Amanda trailed behind him, chatting happily to Ron and Hermione while Harry walked ahead, ignoring the icy-cold wind that slashed at his bare skin. Within his mind, the warm glow that signified Meciél's presence surrounded him, allowing him to ignore the freezing cold as he strode forward in his customary overcoat.

The Care of Magical Creatures class was held on the edge of the Hogwarts ground, near the dark and foreboding forest that surrounded half of the Hogwarts grounds. From the crude and roughly built hut at the edge of this forest, Harry could see other Hogwarts students milling about amongst the gigantic form of Hagrid. The giant man was grinning cheerfully behind his bushy beard and gave Harry and Amanda a cheery wave of hello. Harry ignored him, his eyes riveted to a small area by the lake where even now he could see cracked earth and scorched dirt- signs of the previous battle between Nicomedus' beasts and Harry and Molly.

Amanda waved back at Hagrid as they all came to a stop near the other group of students. Harry let his bored eyes wander around, idly noting the faces, many which were sneaking peaks at him with strange expressions. Although Harry had been at Hogwarts for at least a week, he had already gained a reputation of being a 'bad boy'- and not in the good way either. This, coupled with the fact that Harry rarely approached other students and rebuffed all those who approached him, was enough to garner a lot of attention from the student body, especially with those in the lower years.

Harry's eyes drifted over and stopped at Draco Malfoy, who sneered at Harry. The pale-haired boy had obviously not forgotten about the slight Harry paid him in Potions class. In Harry's mind, Meciél gave a tut of disapproval as Harry met Malfoy's sneer with a wintry smile, his eyes glittering dangerously, and the Slytherin boy fidgeted and looked away much to Harry's amusement.

It was at that moment that Hagrid started the lesson, his booming voice drawing everybody's attention to him. He was talking about a magical creature called a Niffler, but Harry turned out his loud voice. He was barely paying attention to the lesson as he focussed on Meciél, who spoke to him within his mind.

'You should be a little more polite to him, beloved,' Meciél said softly, her voice ringing with disapproval.

'Why?' asked Harry, blinking in surprise as his bright green eyes glazed over. 'You've heard the little git speak. He's nothing more than a twit.'

'Granted, that is true,' Meciél agreed. 'But if you had been paying more attention to your surroundings instead of letting me do all the work, you would have heard that he, his friends and his family are powerful.'

'Meciél, I could kick his arse from here to the Nevernever and back again,' Harry spoke bluntly, an amused smile twitching on his lips as he considered the mental image. However, Meciél didn't even give off

a wisp of amusement, which was unusual for her, and Harry let a small frown cross his face as she responded.

‘ I meant politically powerful, beloved,’ Meciél said softly, encouragingly. ‘He could become a great asset in the Wizarding World later on in the future.’

‘I don’t want any assets, Meciél,’ Harry said in annoyance, barely watching as Hagrid lifted up a small fuzzy creature. He ignored the pleased squeals of the girls, including a very high-pitched squeal from Amanda. ‘I don’t plan on staying here.’

‘Then what are you planning on doing?’ Meciél asked quietly and Harry suddenly got the feeling that the conversation had gotten a lot more serious than he had intended it to be. ‘What will you do in the future? You cannot live like this forever- hiding away from the world. Your power and status, as both the boy-who-lived and as a Denarian Host, will not allow it.’

‘I plan to learn everything I can from you,’ Harry said softly, almost stung at her criticism.

Next to him, Amanda frowned as she looked away from the furry creature in Hagrid’s arms and saw the first traces of genuine hurt on his face. She eyed him carefully, noting the way his eyes were glazed, and almost flinched as she realised that he was talking to the Fallen. Without even realising it, she took a hasty step away from him from under the watchful gaze of Hermione and quickly glanced away.

‘And then what?’ Meciél pressed on, much to Harry’s annoyance.

‘I dunno, Meciél,’ He hissed within his mind, sarcasm laced in his voice as he lashed out in irritation. ‘I thought that since you have, you know, existed before the beginning of time, that my lessons would take a little while to complete.’

‘Sometimes, beloved, you can learn best by doing.’

‘And that means what, Meciél?’

Meciel ignored his questions as she continued to whisper suggestively in Harry's mind, her tantalising voice filling his ears.

‘There are many forms of power, beloved,’ she told him. ‘Magical power, physical power, political power, these are the most common. You have progressed far in terms of magical power, you have a decent understanding of physical power through your sword techniques, but you make no attempt to wield your obvious political power. This is a great weakness of yours and one that I have been unsuccessful in removing.’

‘I don't want to be noticed,’ Harry snapped in his mind, a scowl forming on his face as the rest of the class moved forward to a series of large wooden boxes. Harry stayed back as he listened to Meciel's response, his eyes darkening.

‘Then you will never become as powerful as you wish to be,’ Meciel said simply.

“Look,” Harry snarled out loud, his voice soft but angry. Luckily, there was nobody around to hear him as they all retrieved their own fury Niffles. Harry took a deep breath and tried to calm himself, his anger, annoyance and even hurt throbbing in the pit of his stomach.

‘Look, I don't like that sort of stuff,’ Harry thought a little more calmly. ‘I don't like other people at all. I like my own company, mainly because I seem to be the only one smart enough to understand me.’

‘You must at least try to make the right connections,’ Meciel pressed gently. ‘Political power, when wielded correctly, can be most powerful.’

‘I sure as hell am not becoming a politician!’ Harry growled into his head, his voice bubbling with irritation as he clenched his hands together, gritting his teeth.

‘Please remain calm, beloved,’ Meciel said gently, her voice both reproachful and concerned and Harry felt her throb with a warmth that

put him at ease. 'I did not mean to upset you. I was merely pointing out that...'

'It's as simple as this, Meciél,' Harry interrupted firmly, his voice hard and cold. 'I don't want to do it, so I'm not going to! Remember, I'm the one who's in control here!'

'As you command, host,' Meciél responded, her voice alien and void of all human emotions and Harry shivered at the harshness of it, feeling her brief flash of what seemed like hurt at his harsh words.

A moment later, the fallen angel's warm presence fled from his mind and Harry shivered, suddenly feeling very cold as he turned around and walked away from the class without another word.

Later that day, Harry watched as his hand waved his wand in an elaborate whirl, crimson and ebony sparks flying through the disused and empty classroom. At the present moment, Harry's consciousness resided in the far reaches of his mind. His entire body felt as if it were glowing with a radiant heat as Meciél took control of his motor and magical functions.

"Are you paying attention?" Harry felt his mouth move as the words came out, his voice far crisper than usual. There was an odd double-note in the voice, a subtle but noticeable feminine lisp layering his words.

'Yeah, yeah,' Harry thought with a sigh, but he focussed on Meciél's next movements as his hand rose, the fingers tightly clutched around the wand.

For a brief second, Harry felt the usual rush of hellfire, a blazing inferno of heat and power that accompanied his every spell, whether it was cast by wand, sword or even ring- although Harry hadn't used that crude focus for a number of years now. However, something seemed to clamp down on the dark powers- an icy tinge that usually accompanied a channelling of pure wand magic- and Meciél expertly waved the wand.

Harry felt a slither of pure wand-magic flow through his wand, untainted by Hellfire, and heard an incantation rumble of his lips. On the desk in front of him, a small piece of wood that had been carved into something akin to a matchstick shimmered. A pale silvery colour flowed into it as it lengthened and flattened, one end jutting off into a point and the other end extending out into loop.

The piece of wood had just been successfully transfigured into a glinting silver needle.

Harry felt a rush of warmth leave him and suddenly he was back in control of his body. With a thoughtful frown, Harry absently twirled the wand in his hand as he examined the needle closely, picking it up with his left hand and gingerly testing its sharpness.

“Well, damn me to an eternity of pain and agony in the lowest depths of hell,” Harry whistled, impressed with Meciél as he threw down the needle. “It worked.”

‘Our practise is certainly paying off, beloved,’ Meciél said with an air of satisfaction. ‘Why don’t you have a try now?’

“I’ll bet you a twenty that this doesn’t work,” Harry sighed and raised his wand, narrowing his eyes in concentration. He drew in a deep breath and waved the wand, trying to mimic what Meciél had done with wand-magic when she had temporarily stopped the flow of Hellfire.

On the desk, another piece of wood shuddered as Harry muttered the incantation. The piece of wood shimmered and for a moment, Harry thought that it might actually work. But the shimmer suddenly flashed red and black and the piece of wood hissed and spluttered as it was consumed with flames with a loud and sudden crack.

“Well,” Harry sighed in annoyance as he let out a small huff. “That went well.”

‘Be patient, beloved,’ Meciél said, appearing to be untroubled by his lack of progress. ‘That technique I just showed you requires a lot of skill and practise. It may take some time for you to master.’

“I don’t see why we’re doing this,” Harry admitted as he idly flicked his wand, banishing the small pile of smoky ashes off his desk and sending them soaring across the room. “It’s a waste of time that I could be using to have a nap or clip my toenails.”

‘Transfiguration is a delicate branch of wand-magic but most definitely useful if mastered,’ Meciél said patiently. ‘Besides, I believe there are spells that can clip your toenails for you.’

“Really?” Harry asked, sounding a little surprise as he went back to studying the needle Meciél had just transfigured.

‘I’m certain, beloved.’

“Huh,” Harry uttered. “These wand-wizards have a spell for everything. You have to tell me more of these things, Meciél, or I’ll never learn.”

‘They do have a great many spells for a great many purposes,’ Meciél said with amusement. ‘However, I do not believe they have a spell to stop young boys from trying to waste time, which is a pity for one such as myself.’

“Oh, you never know,” Harry said with an air of mystery, a smile of amusement lighting up his face. “Broad area, wand-wizard magic, isn’t it? Who knows what they have?”

‘Indeed, beloved.’

“They might have...Ooh; I don’t know, charms to make people stay away from you,” Harry said thoughtfully, nodding to himself. “I could really use that one. Maybe they have a spell to break people out of magically binding tournaments?”

‘I sincerely doubt it,’ Meciél said. ‘Otherwise it wouldn’t be known as a magically-binding tournament, would it?’

“Yeah, yeah,” Harry muttered. “I tell you what; I really want to find a spell that kills people who give you dirty looks. I’m starting to get sick of the other students around here.”

‘I believe they call that spell the Avada Kedavra curse,’ Meciél said in amusement. ‘And I thought you didn’t care how other people thought of you?’

“Oh, I don’t,” Harry said quickly, pulling away from the needle and leaning back in his chair. An annoyed frown came over his face as he continued. “I honestly couldn’t care what any of these pathetic spoiled brats think about me, and that includes the biggest and most annoying brat of them all. What I don’t like is when somebody looks at me as if she knows she’s better than me- especially when she’s wrong.”

Suddenly the seat across from him was occupied as the illusion of Meciél neatly slid into it, as if she had been there all along. Her midnight black hair seemed to glow with a radiant light as she folded her hands on top of each other, her silver eyes watching him carefully.

” I see,” Meciél said slowly, her voice quiet. “I presume we are not talking about the Carpenter girl here.”

“What, the brat?” Harry scoffed. “She’s too scared to even think that about me.”

“I didn’t think so. After all, she does seem to hang on your every word,” Meciél said thoughtfully. “Are we talking about that friend of hers, Hermione?”

“Right in two,” Harry responded easily and let out a wistful sigh as he continued. “Sometimes I wish I could just smash her head into the wall.”

“Indeed,” Meciél agreed thoughtfully. “However, I do believe that you made a promise to do no harm to the students of this school.”

“Hey, the last time I checked I wasn’t a Faerie or a demon,” Harry said, almost defensively. “I’m not forced to follow the Old Rules- I choose to. Technically, I could choose to stop following them, if only for a little while.”

“The Order of Blackened Denarius is mistrusted and hated because they choose not to follow the Old Rules,” Meciél said sternly, her voice leaving no argument. “The Old Rules run the supernatural world- whether it is for Vampires, the Sidhe or demons. If you follow them then you will appear to be much more...open...for bargains and conversations and the like. You do not want to gain a bad reputation, beloved. I can assure you of that.”

“Alright,” Harry said quickly, rolling his eyes in annoyance. “I was just saying that I don’t have to, not that I won’t. There’s no need to continue Lecture 1A on Harry’s behaviour.”

“Still beloved, there are other actions you can take if you wish to impart revenge on this girl,” Meciél said thoughtfully. “The Old World runs on technicalities and loopholes, after all.”

“Oh?” Harry said, making a noise of surprise.

“For example, if you truly wished to strike out at her, I suggest that you murder her family,” Meciél said easily and her face had no flicker of emotion as she casually discussed the murder of innocent people. “Kill her mother, father, brothers and sisters if she has them. Make sure that they suffer, so that Hermione will suffer. After all, you only said that you would not harm a student.”

“Right,” Harry said slowly as Meciél continued.

“If that is not too your liking or you wish to strike at the girl herself, then there is nothing stopping you from doing so,” Meciél told him.

“Except my word,” Harry responded slowly, cocking an eyebrow at Meciél’s words.

Meciél shrugged, a small smile curving her lips.

“You swore that you would not strike out at any of the students,” She responded with satisfaction and a glimmer of darkness flickered in her beautiful silver eyes, flames licking at the edge of her pupils. “That leaves quite a lot of room for an indirect attack. Perhaps you can organise for the girl to be tortured? No, such an act would be sure to draw a lot of attention, especially from Dumbledore.”

“Um...” Harry started slowly, eying Meciél strangely. “You seem to have put a lot of thought into this.”

“Not for this girl in particular, but yes, I have,” Meciél told him and a small affectionate smile came over her face. Harry felt something warm ruffle into his hair, as if Meciél was rubbing her hands through them. “I think so that at times of importance, you don’t have to. Hmm, have you thought of getting somebody to apply a curse on the girl?”

“I can think,” Harry said defensively. “And no, I haven’t thought about that.”

“I know of this particularity nasty curse that would rot her mouth away every time she tried to speak,” Meciél said thoughtfully. “Still, there are other ways to break a person, especially a female. Have you considered arranging a rape?”

“Okay, let’s drop this,” Harry said quickly, an awkward expression on his face. “I’ve done a lot of bad stuff, Meciél, but I haven’t fallen that far yet. How about I just go out of my way to annoy her, hmm? Does that work for you?”

“As you wish, beloved,” Meciél said, smiling slightly and sighed. “It is a pity, though. I would have enjoyed hearing her screams of torment, no matter which course of action you had chosen.”

Harry just shook his head ruefully, mostly in amusement at Meciél's antics, and continued his lesson. He frowned and raised his wand, leaning forward and jabbing it at another stick on the desk in front of him. At the same time, he tried to clamp down on the constant stream of hellfire that flowed through his veins. For a brief instant, he suddenly felt a pure rush of the cool magic of the wand-wizards and one end of the stick extended out into a silvery point. However, this only lasted a brief instant and a trickle of hellfire seeped into his wand. The other end of the half-stick, half-needle flickered with flames and curdled with smoke as it was consumed.

"Hey, almost got it that time," Harry crowed triumphantly and the illusion of Meciél gave a proud smile.

"Indeed you did, beloved," She said warmly, her beautiful face glowing with pride. "That was an excellent attempt."

Harry almost flushed at her praise and ducked his head, examining the remains of his transfiguration attempt carefully. After a few moments of prodding the warped silver needle with his wand, he looked up again, his face hesitant.

"Are you still annoyed at me?" He asked bluntly and Meciél frowned, carefully considering her words.

"Not as such," She said slowly. "My annoyance stems from the fact that you may be wasting potential power."

"Meciél, that guy is a dick," Harry said with an annoyed sigh. "And he's a racist. I wouldn't want to ally with him anyway. I think hating people on the basis of a defining characteristic is just stupid. You should hate everybody equally."

"Both of those traits can be used against him," Meciél told him carefully, as if she were being hesitant in her words. "And this isn't just about that boy."

"Oh?" Harry enquired with a raised eyebrow.

“Your attitude puts people off, beloved,” Meciél said, but without malice and her words remained kind and warm. “I know you enjoy acting the way you do – I’ll admit that I enjoy it as well - but you tend to drive away a lot of potential friends.”

“I don’t want friends,” Harry grumbled in protest.

“Allies then,” Meciél countered calmly.

“I have allies!” Harry said in a childish and wounded tone. “I have plenty of allies that like me for who I am!”

“You do?” Meciél questioned and a small smile came over her face. “I must have missed something then. Please beloved, enlighten me.”

“Well, there’s...you,” Harry said and gestured to the illusion of Meciél, who watched him with a serious face tinged with slight amusement. “And...there was...Cessbulby. You can’t say she’s not helpful. There’s...there’s also...er...Maeve. She seemed to like me.”

At the mention of the Winter Lady’s name, Harry saw a flicker of annoyance and even anger come over Meciél’s face and her next words were not kind or warm at all.

“You’re infatuation with the Winter Lady is not only foolish but dangerous,” She said in a severe voice, her face showing her displeasure. “The Faerie, especially the High Sidhe, seek to entrap foolish mortals into bargains they can not possible keep. You know this!”

Harry almost flinched at her tone and felt a throb of anger flood over his mind. Some of it was Meciél’s but most of it was his as he bared his lips back, his eyes glinting with sudden anger.

“Why don’t you just shut up?” He snapped back, his voice filled with anger and hurt.

“Very well,” Meciél said stiffly, her voice alien and remote. Her face looked as if it could have been carved from a statue of ice and she

fell silent. An instant later, her illusion was gone from the chair as quickly as it had come- there was no flicker or shimmer of anything.

Harry let out an exasperated sigh and a bitter expression came over his face as he jumped from his chair and stormed from the room, slamming the door behind him with great force. He didn't feel like studying anymore. Maybe it was time to go see how Faerieland was doing.

Harry glanced around the room as he placed the small bowl of fresh fruits and sweets he had taken from the feast onto the ground, in the middle of an ornate and decorated circle. He looked at the gleaming silver coils and shining jewels that had been embedded into the circle and shook his head, rolling his eyes.

"What a waste," he muttered to himself as he stepped back from the circle. "She's weak and stupid. Professor Annoying must really have it rough."

He almost expected a small laugh from Meciél but the Fallen remained silent, and Harry sighed wearily as he took in the surroundings of the room. Hogwarts, it seemed, was warded against the Nevernever, whether it was a Faerie or creature trying get into the castle or a Denarian renegade trying to open a circle or a portal to get outside of the castle. However, Harry had had a small suspicion that Molly's classroom had been made immune to these restrictions, especially since she was hosting classes on Alternate Magic's and the Old World. Besides, Harry had heard a few of the Hogwarts students that had attended the first class say that the blonde Professor had summoned up a little fairy named Toot-toot- which was exactly what Harry wanted to do.

He was aware of several portraits in the room, all trying to watch him inconspicuously as he went about his business but Harry ignored them as he narrowed his eyes, using his full concentration as he poured power into the circle. There was a flicker of magic, a shimmering red and black haze spiralling around the circle. A faint silvery glow started flashing into the air, growing brighter and brighter with each passing second. From within this silvery glow came a

showering cloud of sparkling silver mote and a female faery appeared from within.

Cessbulby blinked her luminous blue eyes and glanced around, her pinkish-red mane of hair whirling around as she sniffed the air, almost warily. There was a look of reluctance and uneasiness on her face until she spotted Harry, and then she seemed to forget her troubles as a beaming smile washed over her tiny face.

“Harry!” She squealed and buzzed her wings excitedly. A shower of silver motes fell from the dragonfly wings and disappearing with soft flares of light on the floor. Suddenly she sniffed the air again, but this time it was out of curiosity and her eyes flew down onto the tray of fruit and sweets. With an excited squeal, she rocketed down and dug into the food.

Harry blinked and watched the small faery tear into through orange skins and coconut shells with unbelievable strength, lifting the pulp and juice to her mouth and swallowing it all in a giant gulp. He sat back and let the small Winter Faery enjoy her side of the bargain.

A few moments later, Cessbulby sat back, patting her stomach contently. Harry cleared his throat and watched with amused green eyes as Cessbulby gave a surprisingly deep burp and glanced at Harry with languid blue eyes.

“This was nice,” she purred cheerfully.

“I’m glad you enjoyed it,” Harry said and moved forward to sit on the floor next to the small faery. “Now, can I ask you some questions, Cess?”

Cessbulby nodded slowly, blinking furiously as she rubbed her hand over her bloated stomach.

“Who put my name in the Goblet of Fire?” Harry demanded quickly, his eyes intent and his face serious.

“I can’t tell you that,” Cessbulby said and let out another burp, this one sounding more like a startled squeal. She glanced at Harry’s annoyed frown and elaborated. “Maeve can’t see into this castle. It’s warded like a fortress. She might have been able to sneak a glance in but there’s also powerful faery here protecting it, and she can’t get past both.”

“A faery?” Harry blurted out, blinking in surprise.

“Mmhm,” Cessbulby said, nodding quickly. “A Summery Faery as well.”

“Huh,” Harry muttered and a pensive and curious frown came over his face as he pondered that latest development. “I haven’t seen one around and I haven’t felt any faery magic – but I’ve only been here for a week and a half.”

“There is one here,” Cessbulby said and suddenly something sly and almost flirty entered her voice as she leaned forward, ignoring her bloated stomach as her eyes glowed with mischievousness. “Lady Maeve is annoyed that she can’t see you, especially since she wants to talk to you.”

“Er...what?” Harry asked slowly, blinking in surprise.

“Maeve wants to talk to you,” Cessbulby repeated impatiently and stamped a little foot on the ground.

Her wings buzzed once or twice and then she zipped off the ground and towards Harry, landing in the surprised boy’s hair and nestling in beneath the untidy mop of dark hair. Harry growled in annoyance but Cessbulby leaned down and put her head near his ear.

“I can’t really tell you what she wants you for because it’s not part of our bargain,” Cessbulby said and lowered her voice to a sly whisper. “But I heard that it might be about sporting.”

Harry swallowed, a scowl appearing on his face the same time his ears and cheeks flushed with colour. Something tingled in his belly

and he cleared his throat quickly, very well aware of what the Faeries idea of sporting was.

“What do you mean?” He asked quickly, trying to peer up into his dark locks without any success.

Cessbulby let out a small childish giggle and ruffled his hair with a tiny hand.

“Oh no,” She said warningly, amusement laced in her voice. “I told you that’s not part of our bargain, didn’t I little Denarian?”

Harry sighed in irritation, his face quickly regaining its natural colour as he forced his embarrassment down. He let out a wordless growl of annoyance at Cessbulby, but the winter faery ignored him, content to play with his hair. Harry had to admit that the feelings were very soothing as he dropped the subject.

He moved on and started asking his other questions about what Maeve had seen in her little magical video camera of the world. After hearing about a breakout in violence with some vampires and true-wizards, Cessbulby finally brought up the topic of Nicodemus and the other Fallen of the Order of Blackened Denarius.

“There’s no news on Nicodemus,” Cessbulby said idly as she fidgeted in his hair. “Vesper and Bathrail are snatching up Nicodemus’ territory quicker than I can snatch the wings off a Summery Faery- Did I tell you about the time when we caught a Summer Fae in Winter territory?”

“You did, Cess,” Harry said impatiently, eager to get back to the topic at hand. “So, there’s no news on Nicodemus?”

“Nope, “ Cessbulby said cheerfully, but something entered her voice- hesitation. “He seems fixated on the death of the Knight and his family. It’s really not like him at all to give up all of the power he had strived for over the years just for revenge, even if it is over some foolish mortal emotion like love or grief.”

“What do you mean?” Harry asked carefully, narrowing his eyes with thought.

“Nicodemus was always careful and patient,” Cessbulby said. “Now he’s acting ridiculously. It’s really not like him at all. I know Lady Maeve thinks something’s wrong.”

“Something’s wrong?” Harry asked. “Like what?”

“Well,” Cessbulby started but it was at that moment that the doors to the classroom swung opened and dozens of students started to walk in.

They stopped, blinking at Harry in surprise as he glared at them. He didn’t need to even look as he felt a brief flash of ice tingle his scalp- Cessbulby instantly disappearing back to the Nevernever in a burst of Winter magic. Harry wiped a cloud of floating silver motes from his eyes as he stood up, scowling fiercely at the class as a tall blonde woman, Molly, came forward in the robes of a Professor.

“What are you doing here?” She snapped at him, her voice suspicious and untrusting. Her blue eyes stared coldly at him as Harry regained his composure and let a arrogant smirk twist his face.

“I have lice,” He said cheerfully. “And nothing gets rid of lice like a Faery doing your hair.”

Molly blinked but Harry paid her no attention as he quickly strode from the room, leaving behind an astonished class and a speculative teacher. Once outside, Harry sighed and made his way back to the Gryffindor tower.

The meeting had been more or less useful. Nicodemus was being unusually silent, although Harry wondered if he were having problems bypassing Dumbledore’s powerful wards. There was a Summer Faery in the school, something powerful enough to block Maeve from watching in, which mean that Harry had lost a good source of information about the doings of Hogwarts. On top of all of that, Harry had a Triwizard Tournament to worry about.

With another sigh, he planted an annoyed glare on his face and strode into the Common Room, ignoring the stares and looks he received as he stormed up into his dormitory. The room was empty and Harry whipped his wand through the air and slammed the door shut with a powerful charm, before reaching under his bed and pulling out his sword of evocation. The First task was looming up and he had better start preparing for it.

Although Harry wouldn't have believed it a month ago, he had comfortably fallen into a little routine here at Hogwarts that made time seem as if it were flying right past him. In the mornings he would usually sleep in, although his wand was always placed under his pillow and Meciél was always conscious in his mind, monitoring his perceptions when he could not. When he woke up, which was always after breakfast, he would come down to the common room with sleep tussled hair and sleep eyes and eat from the small tray of cold food that Amanda would constantly leave in the corner for him. The girl may have been annoying, but she made for a good servant.

After breakfast, depending on the day, Harry would attend one of his few classes- namely Defence against the Dark Arts, or seek out the small unused classroom where he did most of his practise. Step by step, Meciél would take him through the various basics of Transfiguration and slowly, Harry was becoming a lot more confident in withdrawing the continuous flow of Hellfire that seared through his body, allowing him to preform simple Transfiguration. Of course, it wasn't easy. A single day didn't go by when some poor and innocent inanimate object (or animate, if you wanted to include the small mouse that Harry had vapourised) didn't burst into hellish flames, and there was still the task of actually learning the material. Transfiguration wasn't an easy branch of magic and even Meciél, in her ignorance, seemed to be puzzled over some aspects of it.

After his class of study session, Harry would waltz into the Great Hall for lunch, make a few snide comments to Amanda and spend the rest of the time trying, and succeeding, to irritate Hermione. The bushy haired girl seemed to find something offensive about his mere presence and never held back when she had a chance to tell him exactly what was wrong with. According to her, it varied from being spoiled, arrogant, conceited, disrespectful and rude, and not necessarily in that order. After lunch was Harry's free time, where he would generally lounge around in the Common Room, talking to Meciél about the upcoming First Task and mentally categorising a list of powerful curses and spells that could come in handy. When the sun fell, it was time for dinner and then Harry went to bed again, ready to repeat the procedure all over again. All in all, it was a good couple of weeks.

The First task loomed up and suddenly it was the 24th of November. Harry found himself sitting at the breakfast table with bleary eyes and an annoyed scowl on his face at the absurd early hours of 8:00 am, crunching a piece of bacon in his mouth thoughtfully as he sat at the Gryffindor table. Around him, the other Gryffindors were chattering away with excitement, many of them glancing down towards Harry every few moments. Harry, for one, seemed to be totally at ease but Amanda, who sat next to him, had a worried expression on her face as she sat there, her breakfast untouched.

“Are you sure you’re ready?” She whispered to him anxiously, her grey eyes shining with concern. “Are you sure that there’s no way you can get out of this? I heard that people have died in these tournaments before!”

“Amanda,” Harry said impatiently and squeezed his fingers together, giving her a pointed look. “I have two words for you. The first word is shut. Do you want to guess the second?”

Amanda gave him a withering stare but Harry ignored it as he turned back to his food. A frown appeared on his face as he once again ran through a mental checklist of spells and strategies through his mind. He wore his customary casual clothes, although his overcoat was bundled over his lap. In that bundle, Harry had hidden his sword of evocation. Dumbledore may have said that he was only allowed to bring his wand, but he hadn’t said anything about summoning other items to him when the task had started. This might have been a loophole or a technicality, or it might not even become a problem—either way, Harry didn’t care.

Harry had done quite a bit of preparation for the task, spending the last few nights with Meciél in the disused classroom practising the deadliest evocation and wand spells he knew of. Meciél had recently taught him a powerful pulverising spell, which was capable of completely grinding up small rocks and human limbs. He had done another search of the library for the ever-elusive unforgivable curses, but he hadn’t found anything aside from historical tomes and brief references in other books.

Still, although he looked at ease, Harry could feel a coil of nervousness in his stomach as he ripped his way through breakfast. He let out another scowl, annoyed at himself, and slammed his fork down on the plate with a loud clatter. Despite his practise, Harry knew that somebody had put his name in the Goblet of Fire for a reason and he doubted that it was to let him obtain glory and gold. The First Task wasn't going to be easy, especially if somebody was trying to kill him.

It was at this point that a hush fell over the table. Harry blinked and looked up, seeing McGonagall walking towards him briskly. Her face flickered with disapproval and even anger when she spotted him- she never had forgiven Harry for his first display in her class, and when she spoke to him it was with an icy tone and a curt voice.

"Mr Potter, it is time," She said briskly and gestured Harry to follow her as she spun around and started to walk out of the hall.

Harry didn't say a word as he stood up, clutching the bundle to his side. From the table, Amanda leaned forward, her face solemn and her eyes worried.

"Good luck," She whispered softly, giving him a weak smile.

"I don't need luck. I have arrogance," Harry stated boastfully and narrowed his eyes. "And there's no need to get all emotional on me, or is it your time of the month already?"

Amanda rolled her eyes as he strolled away, aware of Hermione's outraged gasp and Ron's reflexive chuckle at Harry's not-so-quiet comment. For a moment, her eyes tracked the Denarian leaving the hall and a worried frown came over her face. She turned around, barely aware of Dumbledore's approving smile from the Head Table or Molly's disapproving frown as they both watched her interaction with Harry.

His eyes strangely intent, Harry reached into the bag and pulled out a tiny, moving figurine of an elaborately carved dragon. He gulped, a flicker of fear flashing across his face as the small dragon paced on his palm and his head shot towards Bagman.

“This isn’t real, right?” Harry asked hesitantly.

“I’m afraid so, Harry,” Bagman said with a beaming smile and turned back to the rest of the champions. “Now, to pass the First Task, all you have to do is take the golden egg from a nest of real dragon eggs. Be careful, these dragons are mothers, so they will attack you if they think you’re going to harm their nest.”

Harry blinked, ignoring Fleur’s condescending smile and Krum’s amused head shaking as they eyed him from the corner of their eyes. Bagman left the tent, clutching a folder to his chest and left the champions alone. The Denarian frowned and cocked his head, his mind seeking out that of Meciél’s.

‘I didn’t think the Drakon laid eggs,’ Harry thought in puzzlement and he could hear Meciél’s amusement as her voice filled his ears.

‘I do not believe that this is a true Drakon,’ Meciél responded and Harry could feel her carefully analysing the small model in his palm, which let out a silent hiss. ‘This is merely a beast drake- a common dragon, in other words.’

“Well, that’s a relief,” Harry muttered out loud and let out a huge sigh. The tension suddenly left his body underneath the curious stares of his fellow champions.

“What’s a relief?” The Salem champion, Richard, asked with a quirked eyebrow.

“It’s not a real dragon,” Harry said and gestured at little figurine.

“Er...it looks like a real dragon,” Cedric said slowly, peering at his little dragon in confusion, and Harry couldn’t help but notice that the figurine looked a lot smaller than his own.

“Of course zat is a dragon,” Fleur said crossly in heavily accented English, her beautiful face reflecting disdain as she gazed at Harry crossly. “What else could it be?”

“It’s a beast,” Harry said scornfully and threw his little figurine to the ground, where it scuttled off towards his bundled overcoat in the corner. “It’s not a true dragon. Trust me, we’d all become very, very dead if it were a real dragon.”

“We are talking about the fire-breathing monsters, right?” Cedric asked slowly, looking at Harry with puzzlement but Richard suddenly let out a dawning sigh, comprehension flashing on his face.

“You’re talking about those...um...what did Professor Carpenter call them?” He murmured, furrowing his brows. “The ancient dragons...er...the magical ones...”

“Drakon?” Harry supplied helpfully with a cocked eyebrow.

“That’s the one,” Richard said, snapping his fingers and after seeing Cedric’s puzzled gaze and Krum’s brooding face, turned to elaborate. “In my Alternate Magics class, Professor Carpenter told us about the real dragons of the ancient world- the ones from all the myths and that, hoarders of wealth, consumer of virgins, powerful magicians, and all that.”

“Shape shifting,” Harry supplied and a dark smile crossed his face. “They can look like us, you know, just like any other human. You’d never know about it until it was too late and they had consumed your entire family...alive.”

Fleur made a scoffing noise and flicked her hand through the air as she dismissed his words.

“Zere is no such zing,” She said crossly.

“Where do you think these dragons came from?” Harry asked in annoyance. “Do you think one day a lizard thought to itself, “Hmm, Johnny from up the road has grown a wicked new tail, so why don’t I

grow some wings and fly over to his house so I can roast the little bastard alive?””

“Huh?” Cedric uttered.

“Let me put it another way,” Harry said, rolling his eyes. “Why do you think there are tales of Drakons- dragons- wanting virgin girls, hmm?”

“ Oh,” Cedric said with dawning understanding, and frowned, shaking his head. “Er...are you sure? I mean, wouldn't we all know if there were these things walking around?”

“A drakon is a very powerful creature,” Harry muttered darkly. “I doubt any wand-wizard who has met one ever got away from it alive. Their magic is strong, potent and far beyond any of you.”

“But not you?” Krum spoke up for the first time in a heavily accented voice, watching Harry closely with brooding eyes. “You think you could destroy one of these creatures, yes?”

“In the right conditions,” Harry said thoughtfully and gave a cocky smile. “Yes.”

Krum inclined his head and looked away as Bagman burst into the tent, a beaming smile on his face.

“Alright Mr Krum,” He said cheerfully. “You're up.”

Krum merely gave a grunt and stalked from the tent without another word, leaving a silent group of champions behind him.

As a loud blaring voice boomed over the commentary, Harry leant against the wall and blocked it out as he sought out Meciél within his mind, finding her blazing warmth close to his consciousness.

‘I am here for you.’ Meciél said firmly.

‘You’re still willing to help me?’ Harry thought in surprise. If he had asked his question out loud, the other champions would have showed surprise at the hesitance in his voice, Harry sounding more like a worried child rather than a scathing bastard.

‘Of course!’ exclaimed Meciél, her tone almost reproachful and Harry felt her presence flash across his body, sending blazing warmth through his veins. ‘Despite our arguments and disagreements, you are my beloved host. Besides, this is the downside of unions such as ours. I sometimes wonder how the other Fallen with such arrangements solve such situations.’

‘We can always call up Nicodemus to ask, right?’ Harry thought sardonically. ‘I’m sure there’s some kind of Denarian union that takes on equal opportunity cases such as these.’

“You’re funny, beloved,” Meciél deadpanned and a grin curved Harry’s lips as he leant back on his chair, idly noticing a nervous and shaking Richard leave the tent as his name was called out.

‘So, what do we do about the dragon?’ He asked.

‘From what I can recall, the offspring of the Drakon were large reptilian creatures,’ Meciél said thoughtfully. ‘Many of them had the ability to wield fire as a weapon and tool. There were very few of them that had the magical skills and abilities of their sires. Do keep in mind that it has been over two thousand years since I first heard about these creatures, so I cannot account for any changes that evolution may have had.’

‘So, we have a big fire-breathing lizard to kill?’

‘Very over-simplified, but yes, beloved, you have to kill a big fire-breathing lizard,’ Meciél said dryly, making Harry let out a soft chuckle. He ignored the stares he got from Fleur and Cedric and shifted in his seat, closing his eyes and appearing to be asleep. ‘Apparition would be a very good tactic to avoid anything the dragon throws your way. I can keep your mind clear and focussed and allow you to move without losing any important limbs. However...’

‘The school is warded,’ Harry finished flatly. ‘And Apparition is illegal to those under the age of seventeen. See Meciél, this is why I don’t like fair fights.’

‘Indeed,’ Meciél agreed. ‘Now, I believe a powerful spell to the dragon’s head may cause some damage. The original Drakon were very powerful and resistant to many forms of magic but they had vulnerable areas around their eyes. Their descendents may have inherited this same weakness.’

‘So, go for the eyes,’ Harry repeated, nodding his head. ‘Got it.’

‘I suggest a mixture of slashing attacks and physical bashing attacks- spells that do not totally rely on a manipulation of the brain. We cannot be sure of how powerful the brain of a dragon may be- it could resist a stunning charm or a tormentean hex, even if you did strike it towards its eyes,’ Meciél informed him briskly. ‘I know fire is your preferred weapon of attack, and magical fire will burn through most magical protections, but Drakons were immune to the greatest heat. I suggest you avoid any fire-based attack unless you empower it with Hellfire.’

‘Does that mean that steam trick of mine won’t work?’ Harry thought. ‘Damn. It took me a while to think of that little combination.’

‘It will not work, beloved.’

‘Hmm,’ Harry frowned, his brows furrowing, and he barely noticed as the fourth champion left the tent, leaving Harry alone. ‘I have the sword in the tent; I could summon it to me and use it to channel some evocation through it.’

‘If you pour enough power into the sword, it should be able to slice through a beast-dragon’s hide,’ Meciél advised and a note of pride entered her voice. ‘A crafty move, beloved, well done.’

Harry felt a brief flash of pride at her words and smiled widely, a grin of affection lighting up his face and casting away the dark shadows

that always seemed to hide under his eyes. For a moment, Harry sat in his chair, content as he listened to commentator shout something into the microphone in excitement.

“I’m still annoyed at you,” Harry said out loud, but there was no heat or anger in his words, just a simple fact.

‘And I with you,’ Meciél admitted. ‘I do hope you will come around to my way of thinking.’

“Not as long as I can help it,” Harry said cheerfully and he felt a pang of Meciél’s resigned, but amused, exasperation. “Hey, you’ll probably be able to influence and tempt me into later on- I mean, you are a fallen angel, right? But for now, I’m going to remain the funny bastard I always am and insult everybody with two legs and a few things with four.”

‘Very well,’ Meciél agreed, but there was a note of amusement in her voice and Harry could feel that she was satisfied with his response. She had all the time in the world to convert him to her thinking- and he would eventually fold, whether it was tomorrow or one hundred years from now, even if it was just to get her to shut up about it.

Suddenly, Harry heard the commentator call his name. He took a deep breath, a steely look of determination appearing in his eyes as he stood up. With one last glance at his coat and the hidden sword bundled underneath it, Harry pulled the flap to the tent and stepped outside.

“Harry,” Somebody said quietly and Harry stopped with a frown on his face as he turned around.

Ludo Bagman stepped inside the tent, a beaming smile on his face as he approached Harry. Despite the man’s cheerful demeanour, Harry could see that the man seemed to be quite nervous, and his eyes were darting left and right as he approached Harry.

“Do you have any ideas on how you’re going to get past the dragon?” Bagman asked quietly. “Because I noticed you seemed to be a little nervous earlier and you are the Boy-Who-Lived- you have to have some power behind you. I mean, I wouldn’t want anything bad to happen to you.”

“I have a few ideas, yes,” Harry said carefully, eyeing that man carefully, and watched as the Bagman gave him a relieved it somewhat conspiratorial smile.

“Would you like some, ah, advice?” Bagman asked delicately and hurried on. “Not that I’m cheating or anything. I know that you don’t want to be here and it isn’t fair that a Fourth-Year should face this task without even a little bit of help.”

‘Well, it seems as if somebody is quite eager for you to pass,’ Meciell said carefully, and a note of speculation entered her voice. ‘He would be a likely candidate to have put your name into the Goblet of Fire.’

‘He seems to want me to pass the task,’ Harry disagreed silently. ‘Not die a horrible and painful death.’

‘Just because his motives aren’t clear doesn’t mean he is innocent,’ Meciell warned.

Harry nodded, partially to himself and partially towards Bagman, who leaned in, his voice dropping to something below a whisper.

“One of the dragon’s only weak-points is around its eyes,” Bagman said quietly. “A Conjunctivitis Curse would blind it long enough for you to run forward and steal the egg. It’s been spelled to resist summoning charms, so don’t waste any time trying those.”

Harry stared at Bagman and a small and secretive smile came over his face. Bagman let out a beaming smile of his own and silently tapped his nose, before whirling around and disappearing back into the tent.

‘Useful information,’ Meciél said. ‘If only to confirm my hypotheses. I suggest that you watch out for that man, beloved. There are ulterior motives at play here.’

‘Despite our arguments, you’ve already dragged me into politics,’ Harry grumbled as he made his way through a darkened tunnel, approaching the bright sunlight at the end, and it was to the sound of Meciél’s tinkling laughter that Harry stepped out into the arena. For a moment, he simply stared at the surroundings in front of him. He had heard bits and pieces of the weird wand-wizard game that was played on broomsticks, which in Harry’s opinion, wasn’t helping the Wizarding World to move away from the stereotypical view that most non-magical people had on witches. He knew that this arena was normally used to host these games, which would explain the looming large circular stands that rose up above him, filled to the brim with cheering students, wizards and witches.

However, Harry doubted that this game was played over an arena of sharp, jagged rocks, which jutted from the ground menacingly. Harry also doubted that there was usually a gigantic and fearsome looking beast standing in the middle of the arena. For a moment, Harry just stared at the dragon with something like reluctant awe on his face. It was a huge beast- a massive black lizard with gleaming animalistic yellow eyes and two large bat-like wings spreading out from its back. Rows of dark scales gleamed on the dragons back, and its huge tail flicked languidly through the air, layered with hook-like spikes, crushing rocks and leaving yard-long gouges in the hard ground. The beast stood over a small clump of wood, most of it still littered with green leaves, and on that small pile Harry could see a mound of dark-shelled eggs. Amongst the eggs lay a shining golden orb, and Harry eyed it carefully.

“Accio!” Harry called out, his wand whipping up in a quick flicking motion. He could feel the magic pour into the wand but the golden egg remained where it was, firm and unmoving.

‘Didn’t Bagman tell you that it had been spelled to resist summoning charms?’ Meciél asked him.

“Like I was going to believe everything he said,” Harry muttered under his breath and he took a deep breath, a determined glint appearing in his eyes. Around him, the crowd roared with noise—some of it coming in the form of a series of boos, most of it coming in a roar of loud cheers and calls of encouragement. Harry let it all bounce off of him as he took a step forward, his wand rising as he focussed his mind and channelled in Hellfire. A dark blazing rush of power roared into his body, sulphur and brimstone filling his nostrils as he carefully levelled the wand at the dragons head.

But the creature had suddenly stopped moving as soon as Harry had lifted his wand and turned its head, its gleaming yellow eyes staring directly into Harry’s and suddenly he couldn’t move. Something powerful, something tremendous struck at his mind and both Harry and Meciél, surprised by the sudden mental intrusion, froze on the spot. For a moment, Harry’s eyes bulged, panic rushing across his body as he strained to move his muscles. His arm and hand shook with effort, his wand clambering unsteadily in his hands and he glared at the dragon, an orange and red tint the whites of his eyes.

‘A trap!’ Meciél hissed coldly, her voice reeking with sudden anger and malevolence. ‘Find them, beloved! Find them and crush them!’

‘What a good idea,’ Harry thought with a great deal of strain as he fought against the unknown petrifying magic. ‘I’ll get right on it after I’ve had my coffee break, okay?’

The audience had seen the sudden stiffening and halting of his body but most of them must have attributed it to fear or panic and Harry could faintly hear a loud roar of jeering laughs, which complimented a sudden wave of boos and drowned out the yells and screams of encouragement. A small group of dark-cloaked wizards, who seemed to be the owners or keepers of the Dragons, moved forward, their wands up as they eyed Harry carefully, waiting to see if the teenage boy would move or if they would have to subdue the dragon themselves. However, from the corner of his eye, Harry could see Dumbledore watching with a frown on his face, the old man’s face

devoid of twinkling eyes and benign smile, as if he sensed something was not right.

Suddenly the dragon shuddered, its scales rippling and its eyes bulging, and the audience suddenly quietened. The men and women in the dark robes halted and Harry could make out the expressions of confusion and dawning horror as the dragon changed before their very eyes. The dragon seemed to shrink as the dark colour of the scales melted away into a blend of dark grey and white scales, which shimmered and stretched as the very pattern of the dragon's hide distorted and changed. The wings collapsed in on themselves, replaced with wings that were more bat-like than bird-like. The tail seemed to collapse into itself, the rows of dark spikes disappearing as the tail lengthened out, a single sharp blade growing out from the tip until it resembled something a scorpion would have. The biggest change to the dragon was its head, which shrunk in on itself. Large rows of rippling spikes sunk back into its thick skull, its snout shrunk down in on itself and its nose flattered out until it resembled something that was more human than animal.

The dragons eyes were the last to change and gleaming yellow shimmered as its eyelids shrunk back, replaced with malevolent fiery yellow and orange eyes that glinted with an ancient malice and hunger. For a moment, Harry could feel the true power of this creature and felt fear. Luckily, the act of morphing back into its true form had broken the spell the creature had put on Harry, who was able to jerk his eyes away from the mesmerising stare of the fiery eyes, blinking rapidly.

‘By the eternal fires of Hell,’ Meciél swore quietly, her voice quiet and shaky. ‘It cannot be! Why would one of them be here?’

But it was and Harry, along with the rest of the audience, could only watch with stunned eyes as the dragon opened its mouth, revealing a deep inner glow- as if a thousand furnaces burnt in its stomach. A strong smell of burnt wood and smoke filled the air as Harry quickly avoided the creature's eyes as it looked at him once more, and then it spoke.

“FOR THE KNIGHT TO DIE, SO MUST YOU!”

The words shot around the stadium like a wave of rippling force and Harry saw wizard and witches being flung from their chairs by the mere presence and sound of the voice. The words slammed into his head like a sledgehammer, striking at his very mind with a great deal of force but Meciél was ready this time and Harry could feel her close his mind off, creating something akin to a large brick wall around his consciousness that blazed at the cracks with the dark flames of Hell, and the spell- for it was a spell- shattered apart.

The crowd buzzed and cried with surprise, shock and panic as another roar echoed around the stadium, an ancient and horrifying roar that sent fear into the hearts of everybody present. Of the few people that were watching Harry, only a small little deaf girl who could read lips was able to make out the words that left Harry's lips as the creature- not a mere dragon beast but a mighty Drakon, one of the most powerful magical creatures in this world and the next, one of the most ancient and terrifying powers of all history, turned back to Harry, malevolence gleaming from its eyes.

"Oh Fuck!"

Now I have a special treat for all of you. Jon (Who you may know as Surarrin) wrote a small omake about this story. I forget to put it in last chapter, so I'll add it here. If you want it to continue, you had better ask him- because this is all of his work.

Harry quickly staggered forward, approaching the taxi as he saw the well-dressed man pay the driver, and limped his way up to the black taxi as the well-dressed man walked off. His veins were on fire, there was something hot, far different from his power, burning into his veins like acid, and his pain must have shown on his face as he stumbled into the taxi, dropping the sword to the ground, because the driver peered into his mirror and frowned.

“You okay, kid?” The man, a small-bearded man with blue eyes, asked in concern. “You don't look so hot?”

“I’m fine,” Harry said and reached into his pocket, pulling out a fifty-pound note and clumsily threw it at the driver, who snatched it from the air and nodded with a look of skepticism on his face as he turned around, placing the note in his money tray and clicking down the metre.

“Drug-users sure are getting younger these days,” He muttered, before he raised his voice and spoke in a slow, loud voice, as if Harry were hard on hearing. “Where would you like me to take you?” The driver accentuated carefully.

‘I can heal your wounds, beloved, and help you counter this spell,’ Meciél said softly. ‘But you need to find a place to rest, somewhere where you will not be disturbed. Perhaps, a motel’

“Hey, kid! Where to?” The driver demanded impatiently, tapping his fingers on the driving wheel in irritation. “I don’t have all day here. Get off your high and give me some directions!”

“A motel,” Harry said between soft, pained gasps. “A cheap motel, anywhere away from here.”

## Chapter Four: The Denarian Renegade

By Shezza88

"That won't be necessary," a woman stated from just outside the thin metal door beside Harry.

An abrupt feeling of dread tore through Harry's body; he didn't dare look up to the window.

"Who are you lady?" the Taxi driver demanded to know.

"I'm Harry's... mother," she explained calmly, "I was taking him to the hospital, because, as you can see he is dreadfully ill, but he ran away from me," Deirdre lied smoothly.

Harry winced as he felt a cold chill enter the cabin of the Taxi, and a slightly warm hand grip him, and pull him out of the Taxi.

Harry frantically reached down and grabbed a hold of his sword- he managed to, but it was snatched from his hands almost instantly as he brought it close to the female Fallen carrier.

"Now, now, don't be rude to your mommy," Deirdre chided Harry lightly as she, with care that Harry had doubted she would normally be capable of, picked him up from within the Taxi and cradled Harry up against her. He struggled as much as he could, but his weak and battered body wasn't capable of anything besides pain.

"You should stop that, unless you want to die," Deirdre hissed out, tightening her grip upon Harry's body.

"You're going to kill me anyway," Harry managed to spit out before a gasp of pain silenced him.

Deirdre tutted Harry lightly as she walked away from the main road and back into the dark alley that they had battled in.

"I was going to kill you before," Deirdre agreed soothingly, "But I can't just allow such a talent to go to waste when Daddy would love to meet you."

"Daddy?" Harry asked Meciél in his mind.

"Nicodemus, one of the most powerful of the Fallen," Meciél murmured, her voice void of all emotion.

"What are they going to do to us?" Harry asked weakly as his struggles ceased.

"They will most likely kill you and seal the coin I reside in away," Meciél said, her voice melancholy.

Harry whimpered against his captors shoulder, panic started to rise up within him.

"Still such a child," Deirdre murmured in distaste.

"Shut up, you stupid bitch," Harry spat out as he bit down on Deirdre's shoulder through her blouse.

Deirdre smiled amusedly.

"Is that supposed to hurt, little boy?" she asked mildly, "I'm afraid I find it lacking in that department," she whispered out huskily, her voice laced with something Harry didn't recognise, as she nuzzled up against Harry's ear.

"You sick freak," Harry managed to say through a shudder as he pulled away from Deirdre as much as he could.

"Daddy doesn't say that," Deirdre said with a small pout, before her face gained a hard edge.

Without warning she threw Harry to the ground, into a shallow puddle of water.

Harry grunted as he felt his side hit the concrete which covered the alleyway.

"You have two choices," Deirdre explained casually as she pointed Harry's sword at him, "You can either die right now, alone in this alley, or you can co-operate and come with me, and perhaps live to see another day."

Harry's heart thudded within his chest. He had two options then, Die with Meciél by his side. Or Live without her. He closed his eyes tightly.

"What should I do Meciél?" Harry asked shakily in his own mind.

His call went unanswered.

But he already knew what he was going to say.

"Go to hell," Harry said without feeling. There was no hatred, or discontent in his voice, only a tone of resignation.

Deirdre snorted.

"I was kidding about you having a choice," she stated mercurially.

It was the last thing Harry heard, before a sharp pain on his forehead caused him to black out.

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A soft scent in the air was the first thing Harry noticed as he became conscious. It was a sweet fragrance, like flowers, but it was tinged with something else, it was comforting. Harry let out a soft groan as he rolled over onto his back. Whatever he was laying on was soft and warm, a bed, he realised idly. He considered just staying still and drifting back off to sleep.

"Meciel, what happened?" Harry murmured groggily as he rolled onto his side and snuggled down against his pillow.

"Deidre knocked you unconscious," Meciel's voice whispered into his ear tenderly.

Harry sighed contently as he felt a hand rub against his cheek.

"So they left you with me?" he asked as he leaned into the soft warmth of Meciel's palm, "Why would they do that?"

Meciel didn't answer, and her hand stopped moving, Harry quickly noticed. His eyes cracked open slightly, the light momentarily blinded him.

"Meciel?" Harry asked worriedly.

The Fallen smiled down sadly at Harry.

"They have taken the coin away from you," Meciel explained calmly, her lips tilted up in a sad smile.

"But you're still here," Harry murmured his voice filled with relief.

"No," Meciél said softly, shaking her head, "I'm but a shadow of the real Meciél, who placed me in your mind the moment that Deirdre knocked you unconscious."

"Why? What happened to her? Where is she?" Harry demanded to know in quick succession, quickly sitting up and staring intently at the shadow of Meciél.

"She placed me here to help you, however I could," the shadow told Harry as she reached up to his head against and gently cupped his cheek, "She was sealed away, as Nicodemus does to all the fallen who do not follow him, I do not know where, and neither did Meciél."

"I have to get her back," Harry said to the Meciél in front of him, "I need her."

"Nicodemus won't release her, her crimes against him and the other Denarians are too great," she smiled tenderly, "She wasn't sure that they would let you live, she'd be glad."

"Can we escape?" Harry asked quickly, "If we escape and manage to get something that they want then maybe we can get Meciél back."

"You don't get it," the shadow murmured sadly, "They won't give her up, not after it's taken so many thousands of years to get her."

"Why won't they give her back to me?" Harry demanded to know angrily.

"Because," a male voice rang out from out of Harry's view, "There is nothing in this dimension that has the same value as her to us."

Meciél's shadow vanished. Harry's head snapped around to face the voice. A man of medium height and build, with short, dark hair streaked through with an off-center blaze of silver. He wore a simple black silk robe.

"Nicodemus," a voice whispered into Harry's ear.

"You're that bitch's father," Harry said quietly.

Nicodemus smiled amusedly.

"That bitch was supposed to kill you, but apparently you made an impression on her," the older man said smoothly as he stared at Harry, who subconsciously slipped beneath the covers of his bed again, "Meciel left an imprint on you, didn't she?" Nicodemus asked with a smile.

"No, I'm just talking to one of the many voices in my head," Harry retorted sarcastically.

A rich laugh left Nicodemus's lips.

"You see, Harry, you're operating under the assumption that you have nothing to lose," Nicodemus explained as he stepped into the room.

"I'm pretty sure you've taken the only thing I've ever cared about from me," Harry said through a scowl.

"Now there is where our opinions conflict," Nicodemus stated calmly, "I'm of the philosophy, that as long as someone is alive, they have something to lose."

"Yes, yes," Harry snapped, "As long as you're alive you can still die," he snorted lightly.

"No," Nicodemus disagreed, "You still have the ability to choose what you can do, you still have some standards of innocence yet, and most importantly to you," the jovial spirit in Nicodemus's voice vanished, "You still have the remnants of Meciel left within you, the memories of her, the traces of power, I can take that all away from you," he finished in a matter-of-fact voice.

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A chill ran down Harry's spine.

"Could he do that?" Harry asked the shadow in his mind.

"Yes," Meciél answered simply.

"What do you want from me?" Harry demanded to know, "Meciél said you would kill me, why haven't you?"

Nicodemus let out another laugh.

"I did tell you, did I not?" the man stepped into the room, past the doorway, "My little Deirdre found you interesting, unfortunately, without giving you Meciél back, I'll never find out exactly how interesting," Nicodemus murmured, a light frown appearing on his face briefly, before disappearing.

"Not interesting enough," Harry grumbled to himself lowly.

"Interesting does not necessarily mean strong," Nicodemus explained casually as he advanced towards the bed, "There is more interest to be had in an event where the outcome is decided by more than power. Something which you know shall come to pass is not interesting at all," he explained as he sat down at the end of the bed.

"So I'm alive because I couldn't kill your daughter," Harry asked perplexedly, "That's stupid," he said bluntly.

A light yawn or a laugh echoed from the doorway.

"If that is stupid then I should just kill you right now to correct my mistake," Deirdre yawned from the doorway.

"Go ahead," Harry challenged, before he redirected his attention to his mind momentarily, "What kind of help can you give me, enough to escape?"

"You do not understand," Meciél's shadow murmured softly within Harry's mind, "I hold none of Meciél's power, only her personality I might be able to give you access to hellfire, but without anyway to channel it properly you'd kill yourself,"

Harry's eyes widened slightly and a second chill ran down his spine.

A sadistic delight registered in Deirdre's eyes a moment before her tongue swept over her lips, in an almost reptilian fashion.

"You finally understand your position," Nicodemus stated calmly as he regarded Harry.

Harry stared at the Drakon, his green eyes wide and his features reflecting amazement, shock and most importantly, fear. The Drakon roared again, a loud booming sound that blasted around the stadium as students and onlookers alike began to move from their seats. Distantly, Harry could hear screams of panic and fear but he blocked them out as grasped Meciél's power, allowing it to pour into him. Fire blazed in his veins and sulphur filled his nose as Harry glared at the Drakon with anger, his eyes glinting maliciously.

The dragon keepers almost instantly recovered from the shock of seeing a dragon morph into another dragon-like creature and several of them raised their wands, their voices shouting out incantations. Bursts of crimson lights streaked from their wands and struck upon the Drakon's thick hide to no effect and breaking apart in a shower of glowing sparks. The Drakon brushed off their attacks with ease, its fiery eyes turning back to glare at Harry, who ducked his head as he channelled Hellfire into his wand. Smoke curdled from the runes, dark power flickered at the tip as Harry levelled his wand at the Drakon and prepared to summon his most powerful spells.

It was at that exact moment that Harry felt a flare of blazing power and his eyes automatically shifted up towards the source. Dumbledore stood aloft the stands, his face white and furious and his eyes cold and hard. He held his wand aloft as blazing power struck forward in a devastating cone of magic, seemingly made up of pure light. The old wand-wizard's beard and long white hair swayed underneath a powerful force of his spell and his hat went whipping off his head as he thrust his wand forward. The Drakon let out a loud screech of pain as it staggered back by the sheer force of the spell as it was struck, its fiery eyes seeking Dumbledore as the Headmaster stood tall and strong, his face grim.

The spell dug deep into the Drakon, shattering apart hard scales and thick hide, but the Drakon opened its mouth and let out a single piercing snarl. Harry, who was watching with wide eyes, grunted in pain as the sound slammed into him and knocked him off his feet and he landed on the ground. He watched with stunned awe as the Drakon's spell shattered apart Dumbledore's spell and blasted forward in an invisible rush of power. Dumbledore twirled his wand and defensive magic's shimmered around his form, a haze of blue

and green light that shimmered and sparkling as the blast of power struck it and shattered apart.

An instant later, the Drakon had opened its mouth and with a single whip-like movement of its head, spat out a blaze of searing molten flames. Dumbledore made no movement but his eyes widened a fraction as the green and blue magic solidified around him until it seemed as if he were encased in a sparkling crystal of light. With a deft flick of his wand, the blue-green left his form and blasted forward, striking the tip of the Drakon's fiery blast. Fire hissed and magic shattered as the powers enveloped each other in bright flare of light, leaving Dumbledore unharmed.

But the old wizard was too slow as the Drakon let out another piercing snarl. Although the Headmaster's wand came whipping up and another blue and green haze began to envelop him, Harry knew in an instant that it was too slow and struggled to get to his feet. For a split second, Dumbledore's hard blue eyes met Harry's defiant green eyes, and then Dumbledore sent forward the half-formed shield of defensive magic towards the Drakon's blast of power. There was a lesser flare of light as Dumbledore's spell shattered and the blast of power lanced forward towards the unexposed wizard.

Suddenly there was a flash of flames and something red and gold streaked forward like a fiery comet, slamming into the blast of power and exploding in a burst of flames. Although the fiery comet had taken the brunt of the spell, the backlash slammed against Dumbledore who was knocked off his feet and thrown backwards. Despite his fearsome powers and arcane knowledge, Dumbledore was just as fragile as a normal human- perhaps even more- and the elderly man slammed into the wooden benches, which cracked and snapped apart as Dumbledore came to a rest, his body still and unmoving.

The Drakon staggered back up, a furious but triumphant roar of pain and power escaping its throat as it recovered from Dumbledore's spell, while people crowded over Dumbledore's still body. The dragon handlers continued to cast their spells, crimson streaks of magic repeatedly blasting apart on the Drakon's hide with little effect to no effect. Harry had staggered back up and with a short swish of his

wand and a muttered incantation, he summoned the bundle from the tent he had left it in and quickly unravelled it. A gleaming rune-etched sword met his gaze as he quickly opened up his overcoat, adrenaline surging through his veins as he took hold of the powerful magical sword and glanced up.

The Drakon was in the process of turning back to the Denarian Renegade, its fiery eyes gleaming with an ancient malevolence. Harry took a deep breath and channelled Hellfire from his wand and into his sword. His eyes glinted with dark powers, anger and blazing hatred appeared on his face and dark feelings of excitement, lust and pleasure filled his mind as searing power roared through him, urged on by Meciél as Harry started to prepare a powerful spell of evocation.

It was at that moment that Moody raised his wand from the head-box, his mangled face looking oddly hollow and etched with anger as he stepped past Dumbledore's still body and faced down the Drakon without a hint of fear.

"Avada Kedavra!" He roared angrily, his voice echoing in the large stadium and for a moment, everything stopped.

From his wand came a deadly flash of green magic, a beam of glowing death that streaked forward and struck the Drakon. The Drakon let out a loud roar of pain, its voice blasting forward and sending people tumbling as they ran from the stadium as the flash of green light dug into its hide. Grey scales darkened and shattered and drakon hide sizzled madly as the killing curse struck the Drakon on the chest. Moody's triumphant grin quickly faded away as he stared at the Drakon in horror, which, while scratching at its new wound with a growl of pain, was very much alive. Members of the crowd stared in disbelief at the Drakon and then the screaming seemed to intensify as the ancient creature turned around to confront Harry, once and for all.

"Any advice, Meciél?" Harry asked between gritted teeth as the sword shuddered and trembled in his hands, its runes glowing with an unholy red glow as he hoisted it up and levelled it at the Drakon.

‘Attack it, beloved,’ Meciél said grimly. ‘And then run!’

Harry didn’t say anything as he took in a deep breath, readied his magic and steadied himself. He slammed the sword into the ground with great force and closed his eyes as he lashed out with one of the most powerful pieces of magic he knew of.

His very form shimmered with repressed heat and the air thickened into something like a fog, as if Harry was sucking up all the heat around him. A bright yellow and red glow emanated from behind him as his green eyes glinted with dark power. Suddenly there was a loud blaring crack that sounded almost like a firecracker and a single ball of blazing fire streaked forwards from his shimmering form.

An instant later the air was filled with loud cracks as a barrage of streaking fire lanced through the air, spinning and spiralling as they lashed out at the Drakon, looping around the large creature and slamming into its hide in a wave of successive explosions. The Drakon roared in pain as its body was bombarded with small concussive explosions, billows of fire rushing out and threatening to envelop it as dark oily smoke pumped out into the air.

Harry clenched his sword and fought down a wave of fatigue as the last glowing streak of fire left his body and the shimmering aura around his body disappeared. His green eyes watched with a flare of satisfaction as the Drakon burned in bright yellow flames, but a second later they widened as the Drakon opened its mouth and let out a powerful piercing whistle, a single note that pulsed through the air and suddenly the fire was gone, washed away by the Drakon’s counter-spell.

A second later, the Drakon turned its head down towards Harry, who avoided its deadly fiery eyes, and it opened its mouth and lashed out. Harry’s eyes widened as a beam of magnificent power zapped forward like a jolt of cackling red lightning and making his own power look like a dog next to a dinosaur. With all of his strength, Harry tugged the sword from the ground and hurled himself to the side as the beam shot past him, making all of his hairs stand up on end and sending goosebumps down his arms.

He landed painfully on the ground as the beam struck where he had just been standing and sliced through thick boulders. The ground shuddered and rumbled as stone melted into glowing molten rock and steam hissed from the ground as the beam sliced into the earth. Fear coursed through Harry's veins as he picked himself up from the ground, ignoring the aches and bruises he had as he turned to face the Drakon again, just as it opened its mouth and let out another piercing snarl.

A blast of power rocketed through the air and with a cry of panic Harry brought up his wand and sword. He gritted his teeth as he poured Hellfire into a defensive shield. Dark crimson and black magic flickered as a globe of magic solidified in front of him. The shield had been formed in just the right way; there was enough power in its structure to keep the defensive spell up, so when the blast of power struck the shield, it didn't reduce him to a small smear. It did, however, hurl Harry off his feet and send him flying through the air as a loud clanging noise filled the air.

Harry landed on the hard ground with a wince of pain and for a moment just lay there, stunned. Flickering crimson and dark energies shimmered out of existence as the shield dissipated, having saved its owner from not only the spell but the fall, which would have snapped several of Harry's bones. With a small wince, Harry inclined his head and grasped his wand in his hand. With a quick flick and a small push of Hellfire, one of the large boulders in front of him groaned in protest as it was lifted from the ground and hurled at the dragon. It smashed on its hide with no effect, crumbling to dust as Harry staggered back on his feet.

The dragon keepers were still bombarding it with spells and had moved away from the stunning charm and onto some more dangerous and particular nasty ones- some Harry recognised as exceptionally painful dark magic. It wasn't enough to hurt the Drakon but was enough to irritate it and divert its attention for a second as it turned its head around. Harry raised his sword and concentrated his power as the Drakon was distracted, ignoring the ancient creature as it let loose a spew of blasting heat and liquid magma.

The wand-wizards scuttled away and most of them managed to get clear in time, but one unlucky wizard screamed in agony as a goblet of steaming lava splashed on his wand arm, disintegrating it before his very eyes. He gurgled with pain and shock, his eye staring unblinkingly at the arm as he fell to his knees, his face wrapped up in pain as one of his fellow wizards, a red-haired man, flicked his wand and hurled the man away from the Drakon and out of the stadium.

At the same time, Harry was breathing harshly as he prepared another evocation spell. Within his mind, Meciél helped him weave and form the magic together as he held his sword upright. Around him, the air shimmered with heat and flickered with fire as the runes in Harry's sword pulsed with an odd red light. The air around him flickered and shimmered with an oily black haze as thick smoke drifted into the air, while sulphur and the smell of dirty smoke filled Harry's nostrils as he pumped massive amounts of Hellfire and magic into his spell.

After several seconds, Harry heard a deafening series of loud roars and winced at both the noise and the sudden bright flashes around him as several blazing rods of roaring flames burst into existence. The flames roared with the dark power of Hellfire as Harry made a sharp gesture with his hand, his eyes glinting, and the flickered as they changed. The flames roared with a greater fury as they changed into fiery mimics of Harry's sword, runes, hilt and all, and continued to hover around him.

As the Drakon turned back to him, Harry allowed a tight and wicked smile to curve his lips, his eyes faintly glowing with an inner darkness as he, with Meciél's direction and occasional manipulation, finished weaving his spell and lazily lifted out an arm.

‘I feel the sudden urge to shout out something like “Flaming swords” or “Blazing inferno”,’ Harry mentally remarked to Meciél and he ignored her exasperated sigh.

‘Now is not really the time for your wit,’ she snapped out in annoyance. ‘Release the spell!’

Harry gave a tight nod, his face grim, and with a single broad gesture, he extended his arm out in front of him and pushed out. The swords of burning hellfire roared with the power of a blazing inferno and shot forward as Harry released the spell. Dizziness and weariness struck his mind and even with Meciél acting as a buffer, Harry gave a groan and collapsed to the ground on all fours and watched the end result of his spell.

In an impressive display of force and power, the glowing swords of fire shot through the air with great force. The Drakon appeared to be surprised by the pure force of the spell and took a rumbling step backwards, opening its mouth and letting out a single piercing note. Harry flinched as he lay sprawled over the ground and watched with despair as the swords of flame grew brighter and brighter as they travelled closer and closer to the Drakon, until just as the swords were about to pierce on the Drakon's hide, they exploded in a roaring inferno of deafening noise and blinding light.

Although the Drakon had dispelled Harry's spell, the aftermath was apparently troublesome or powerful enough to cause it pain and it let out a loud piercing screech that struck Harry's mind like a sledgehammer. An instant later, another roaring beam of steaming hot magma shot forward- right over Harry's head and splashed on the ground behind him. Rocks sizzled and melted and steam pumped into the air as Harry staggered up, his eyes wearied and fatigued.

'This isn't going so well,' He murmured in his head.

'So I see, beloved,' Meciél said tensely. 'And it's just gotten worse.'

Harry watched and as the Drakon bent down on its powerful legs and flapped its large wings, its malevolent eyes burning with ancient anger and irritation. With a huge roar, it hovered in the air with steady flapping movements and slowly flew forward. Dirt blackened and rocks seemed to sizzle in the Drakon's presence as it loomed towards Harry, who dropped his sword wearily and levelled his wand at it.

'Here goes nothing,' he thought grimly.

“Avada Kedavra!” He spat out, his green eyes glinting with rage and he felt a rush a power sweep through him, reeking of a decidedly different odour than Hellfire, but still dark in nature.

From the tip of his wand flickered eerie green sparks and a weak and dull flash of light zoomed from his wand, looking like a series of glowing green splinters. The half-formed curse flickered and seemed to wobble before it broke apart in a shower of sparks as Harry’s first attempt at the Killing Curse failed.

“Crap!” Harry snarled angrily and swiped his wand through the air, Hellfire searing through his veins as it enhanced his next spell.

The devastation curse, a high-level piece of dark magic, blasted from the tip of his wand in the form of a powerful flash of violet light. The curse sliced into the approaching Drakon’s hide and hard scales were asunder. The Drakon let out a loud screech but the wound was nothing more than a small cut to the ancient creature as it flapped its way forward and opened its mouth, fiery eyes peering from an almost-human face. A bright sparkling flare burst forward and Harry gave a panicked cry as he threw himself to the side, pain flaring in his side as he landed on the rocky ground with a grunt.

The flare flew past him and although Harry didn’t look back, he could feel it explode as a wave of almost unbearable heat struck his back. He flinched but ignored the pain as he staggered up, his eyes bright with bloodlust as he bared his teeth at the Drakon.

“Cornollivo!” He spat out angrily. His arm buckled as a streak of dark-coloured magic burst from his wand, accompanied by an eerie screeching noise.

This time, the Drakon was ready and with a single piercing whistle, the curse was deflected aside by a massive force and struck one of the large jagged boulders, reducing it to dust with a dark flash of light in a matter of seconds. It opened its mouth once more as it swooped down on Harry and although it made no sound and produced no visible light, something huge and unseen rushed through the air.

Because of the close proximity of the Drakon- it was only a few metres away from Harry- and the sudden nature and power of its attack, Harry was barely able to raise any form of defence. He managed to cross his arms over his chest and fear surged in his veins as he hastily conjured a defensive barrier around him, but the blast of unseen power slammed into him and sudden Harry was in pain.

He screamed in agony as his barrier shattered underneath the powerful blow and barely felt his feet leaving the ground as he was thrown backwards. He slumped to the ground several metres away, distantly aware of cracks and a sudden burst of pain in his stomach as a feeling and awareness, like liquid fire, poured into his veins and slammed into his head. Unlike Hellfire, which was incredibly pleasurable and intoxicating, this spell burned with a different type of heat which produced an agony that Harry had never felt before. He was burning, he was being burnt alive. Flames were consuming his body, his limbs, his muscles, his heart, his mind.

And suddenly it was all over and the Drakon's massive presence abruptly left his head. Harry blinked tears of pain away from his eyes as he struggled to lift his head, his body aching all over, and distantly saw a swarm of crimson-robed figures rushing in at the other end of the stadium, a constant barrage of light bursting from their wands as they tried to strike down the Drakon. Some of the flashes of light glowed with an eerie green glow and combined, it was enough to make the Drakon roar in agony and turn away from Harry's prone body. A blast of power sent the crimson-robed figures scuttling for cover but they consistently and professionally resumed their attacks, drawing the Drakon's attention away from Harry and towards this new threat.

‘Now, beloved,’ Meciell said, her voice pained. Her perceptions came from Harry's, after all, and Harry was in a great deal of pain at the moment. ‘Now is the time to flee. Your spells have done little damage to the creature. You cannot take much more of this beating!’

‘How?’ Harry asked painfully, wincing as he tried to stagger up on his feet. But a wave of dizziness struck his mind and pain flared in his chest and he gave a grunt and slumped back down on the ground. ‘The anti-apparition wards are still up. I can’t leave!’

‘Try to make a portkey,’ Meciél advised. ‘Remember what I have taught you and focus your energies!’

Harry made another grunting noise and with tender fingers, he gripped his wand tight and tried to focus his mind. He lifted his eyes and picked the first loose item he saw, a small jagged rock, and gave a weak flick of his wand.

“Portus!” He muttered softly. The rock shuddered and trembled as a blue glow surrounded it, but an instant later Harry gave a groan and his wand dropped. The rock continued to shudder and tremble as the blue glow intensified, before it gave a loud crack and exploded in a small shower of thick black ooze.

‘I think that last spell loosened my brains a little,’ Harry muttered wearily as he flopped back down on the ground, blocking out the distant noise of spells, curses, bestial roars and human cries. ‘Any other ideas? Or should I just lie here and wait for the Drakon to come and kill me?’

‘You must flee!’ barked Meciél, her voice both stern and worried. ‘You cannot win this fight with your own powers...unless...’

‘What?’ Harry thought impatiently, wincing as he tried to block out the pain and aches lancing through his body. ‘What is it, Meciél?’

‘Unless you ask for help,’ Meciél finished quietly, her voice remote and speculative.

‘From who?’ Harry thought incredulously as he tried to pull himself off the ground, hissing in pain as he felt his broken ribs jab into his flesh. ‘The wand-wizards are getting their butts handed back to them!’

‘The Fae can, at times, lend power to those who ask for it,’ Meciél said rapidly. ‘They can temporarily enhance your own magical abilities and allow one to perform powerful magical feats.’

‘Wait, you want me to call a faery for help?’ Harry thought in disbelief. ‘How many times have you told me to never, ever, make a bargain with a Fae?’

‘How many times have you ever fought a Drakon before?’ Meciél snapped back.

‘Valid point,’ Harry admitted. ‘But it doesn’t matter how much I like the little sadistic and sociopathic girl, I just can’t see Cessbulby giving me that kind of power.’

‘Then I suggest you call Maeve,’ Meciél said impassively.

The Drakon roared again as a flash of green light seared into its thick scales but Harry ignored it as his eyes widened with shock and surprise, a bubbling laughter of disbelief leaving his lips as he stared vacantly into the air, seemingly talking to nobody.

‘You want me to do what?’ He asked. ‘Hang on! You don’t like Maeve. I mean, I get the feeling at times that you would like to capture Maeve and roast her alive. Why the hell would you want me to call her of all people?’

‘Because, beloved, she is powerful!’ Meciél hissed, almost defensively. ‘She is easily one of the most powerful Winter Fae’s in the Nevernever. You have knowledge of one of her names, which will allow you to summon her. These facts combined lead me to the unavoidable conclusion that Maeve is the fastest and easiest way of gaining the power you need to kill that accursed beast!’

‘It’s just that...’ Harry began, wincing in pain as he managed to sit up from the ground.

‘Maeve and I have a personal history that you are unaware of,’ Meciél said flatly and coldly, halting Harry in his tracks. ‘I will tell you

that she is one of, although not the primary, reasons why my last host was murdered. However, at this point in time, there is no other way. I do urge you to be cautious though and heed my word as you make your bargain! Now hurry, the wand-wizards are already falling back!’

Harry’s eyes flickered to the other end of the stadium, where the crimson-robed wand-wizards were retreating from the fiery power of the Drakon, which roared in triumph as it opened its mouth and let out another blast of invisible power. The crimson-robed wizard ducked and the boulder behind him exploded in a wave of shrapnel and smoke. Harry frowned, ignoring the pain in his body as determination and anger gripped his mind and with gritted teeth, he focussed his mind.

His eyes flittered up and down and his mouth parted as Hellfire rushed through his body, its blazing warmth temporarily relieving him of his pains and aches as he wove his spell, a variant of the summoning spell that he used to use to trap Cessbulby- he didn’t stand a chance trying to trap a Queen of Winter Fae. With a sudden exhale, Harry breathed out the name of the one he wanted to call.

“Maeve, of the Winter Court, I summon you.”

The words washed through the air and seemed to sink into the hard rock and dusty ground of the stadium, a faint echo disappearing with a soft tinkling sound as Harry waited. The Drakon was still roaring in triumph as it sent wand-wizards scuttling with every attack. It seemed to be in no hurry to turn back to Harry- its belief in its own powers and its instincts to hunt and kill seemingly overriding rational thought.

Suddenly, after a few seconds, Harry shivered as goosebumps crept up his arms and a gust of cold air struck him. He blinked and swivelled his gaze around the stadium. The loud roaring noises of battle seemed to dim as he sought out the source of the freezing wind, which turned out to be a puddle of molten rock that the Drakon had created.

With a pained grunt, Harry crawled over the hard ground and peered down into the crater. Icy shards were crystallising along the sleet of liquid fire, which was shimmering as it solidified into ice. It was almost

beautiful as red, yellow and orange hues flashed under the icy surface, but it only lasted a few moments before an image appeared within the frozen depths.

The first thing Harry saw was Maeve's eyes, strange canted, feline orbs of the deepest green. These eyes were set in a face too perfect to be human, with pale radiant features of a teenager in her late teens. Her hair, which had been bound into long dreadlocks the last time Harry had seen her, flowed down her back in long strands of differentiating colours, ranging from deep lavender to pale blues and greens to pure white. The hair seemed to sway under its own power, shimmering like a glacial waterfall. Only Maeve's head and the top of her chest was shown within the ice and Harry had to tear his eyes away from the dangerously tight shirt of blue silk, which exposed her cleavage in a very interesting way.

"Maeve," He murmured softly to himself and something raging rose up in him, primal and unbridled, and for a second Harry thought he would lose himself in pure desire. But this time, and without the help of Meciél, Harry focussed his mind and blasted apart the sexual glamour while wrapping his mind around a coil of protective Hellfire.

"My dear little Harry," Maeve said seductively and smiled a brilliant smile that curved her face in a very nice way. The Winter Lady just didn't need to rely on her magic to make her seem attractive. "I knew you would call on me one day. It was only a matter of time."

"I want to make a bargain with you, Maeve," Harry said bluntly and tiredly.

"You don't want to catch up?" Maeve asked with apparent surprise and she placed a perfectly manicured hand over her mouth, a devious grin curving her lips. "Pity. I am very interested in you, Harry."

Harry almost shuddered at the way she said his name but with an annoyed growl, he blasted apart her next glamour- a much more subtle charm that he had barely noticed in time.

“In case you hadn’t noticed, Maeve, I’m bleeding a little,” Harry said dryly and in annoyance. “And I have a Drakon trying to kill me. Can we cut to the chase now or should I just go and invite the Drakon for a nice little tea party while you indulge yourself with your glamour’s?”

Maeve’s face flickered with the first sign of her true nature, a void and alien expression coming over her face and wiping away all traces of her humanity, but at the mention of the Drakon she stopped and blinked in shock.

“A Drakon?” She asked sharply, her seductive voice replaced with surprise. “There, at Hogwarts?”

“It’s either a Drakon or it’s a bloody crocodile with wings that somehow learned how to talk and throw around powerful wizards with its voice,” Harry retorted furiously. “What do you think?”

Maeve frowned, appearing troubled and something in her gaze told Harry that she was worried, although Harry could tell that it was more than just concern for his wellbeing.

“There are only eleven of the ancient Drake’s left in the mortal world,” Maeve said and her green eyes roamed Harry speculatively. “What did you do to annoy them so?”

“Long story, still don’t know the details,” Harry replied quickly and in annoyance. “What, with the thing trying to kill me and all. Can we make a bargain now?”

Maeve suddenly regained her confident and seductive poise and she gazed at Harry with dilated pupils, a pink tongue idly linking her lips, and Harry swallowed, partly because of the rush of desire that ran through him and partly because of the feeling of doom that suddenly slammed into his chest.

“What do you want?” Maeve asked softly, eyeing Harry beneath hooded eyes.

“Oh, you know, the usual,” Harry replied. “World peace, cure for cancer, and all that rot. For now, though, you can just make that thing dead.”

“Dead?” Maeve echoed softly. “You will have to be more specific, Harry.”

” Kill it,” Harry snarled and all traces of mockery left his voice as his glinting emerald eyes struck Maeve’s, who appeared startled by his sudden vehemence. “Or give me the power and help me kill it. Just make it dead!”

Maeve nodded slowly.

“I can help you here,” She said and a sly smile came over her face. “For a price, of course.”

“What’s your price?” Harry asked bluntly. “It better not be my soul—that’s already been rented out to somebody else.”

“Normally I would ask for a favour, a debt, a term of servitude,” Maeve said softly and seemed to lean in. Harry shivered as he felt her breath, which was strangely warm, rush over his ears as a seductive breath tingled his face. “But for you, I have plans.”

“What do you want?” Harry repeated softly, hardening his voice, but Maeve didn’t appear to be affected as she gave him a suggestive smile as she licked her lips again.

“A child,” she said softly, her voice hoarse with a sudden hunger. “I want you to give me a child.”

“What, like from an orphanage or something?” Harry asked, a frown coming over his face. “Cause I can do that- depending on what you want me to do with the brat. I still have some semblance of morals, Maeve.”

“No, no, no,” Maeve laughed delicately and her eyes smouldered as she forced her wanton gaze on Harry, who was unable to look away as she continued softly. “I want you to give me a child.”

“What?” Harry whispered and he felt Meciél give a giant flare of surprise as the sudden urge to shred the Drakon apart disappeared. “Did you mean what I think you meant?”

“I will aid you and lend you great power to strike down at this beast,” Maeve began. “I will also send forward my own power and help you kill it. But, in return, you will give me a child...our child, which will be created at a later date of my choosing.”

Harry’s eyes widened as a surge of emotions bubbled in his stomach, a mixture of surprise, shock, confusion, suspicion and even a hint of anticipation. He opened his suddenly dry mouth and swallowed, his eyes never leaving Maeve’s.

“What?” He whispered softly. “I...don’t get...what?”

“That is my price,” Maeve said with a tone of finality and she gave Harry a seductive smile, an almost-predatory glint in her slanted eyes. “I assure you Harry, it is not a hard price to pay...and you will enjoy it.”

‘Meciél, what do you think of this?’ Harry thought quickly. ‘I mean, she can’t be serious, right?’

‘I am unsure of her schemes, beloved,’ Meciél said uncertainly. ‘It could easily be a plot to tie you closer to her- although I cannot say why she would want such a thing. Perhaps she wants to bind you to the Winter Court- No; she would not ask for this if she sought that. I...I cannot be certain to what she is trying to accomplish here.’

‘Do I take the offer?’ Harry asked hesitantly. ‘It doesn’t seem so bad.’

‘She is a Fae. Their bargains are always bad for the mortals,’ Meciél said, a touch of bitterness in her voice, as if she touched upon

a subject Harry didn't know about. 'Still, you have come this far and you need the power. The Drakon is almost finished playing with the wand-wizards and it will be back for you. Just...be wary, beloved. Be very wary.'

Harry refocussed his attention back down in the frozen crater of lava, where the image of Maeve stared back at him with smug eyes, as if she knew what Harry had just asked Meciél. He narrowed his eyes suspiciously, trying to think of what she could be trying to accomplish here.

"There are no other costs?" He asked shrewdly. "You just want me to knock you up?"

"Yes," Maeve said, a smile curving her lips.

"And that's it?" Harry pressed. "No more debt? I don't ever have to call on you again?"

"You will not be compelled to, no," Maeve answered and her eyes glittered. "But you will call on me again. This is just the first of many bargains we will make, even if you do not know it yet."

Harry pursed his lips but a sudden roar at the other side of the stadium made him flinch and he gritted his teeth, indecision racked on his face. There was something going on here, something he couldn't see, and for some reason Harry thought he was walking into a trap. Still, there wasn't much he could do about it.

"Fine," He said abruptly. "You have a deal."

He looked down only to find that Maeve was gone and the ice was quickly melting back into molten rock. His eyes whipped around the stadium, furious and annoyed as he staggered to his feet, trying to ignore the pain in his chest. The Drakon turned back to him, its fiery eyes seeking him out, while Harry desperately searched for whatever Maeve was going to send him.

Suddenly his vision blurred and he let out a cry of pain as he doubled over, his hands clutching his stomach as he screwed his eyes shut. A roaring blizzard of pain was raging in his stomach and quickly spread across his body, making him shiver uncontrollably. There was something cold and icy running through his veins, a power opposite of everything he had ever wielded before. Where Hellfire was hot, Winter power was cold but just as potent. Power roared through his veins as the pain faded away and Harry stood up, his eyes as bright as a storm as he faced the approaching Drakon, his aches and pains disappearing underneath the enormous amount of power flowing through him.

Above the stadium, the clouds rumbled ominously and the first trickle of snow started to fall. The sun disappeared behind a large and thick thundercloud, which flashed with unnatural power, and the thick scent of winter magic filled the air. There was another power at work here and Harry closed his eyes, probing the magical storm with his sense. He didn't feel any surprise when he felt the wild mind of Maeve directing the spell and his lips curved upwards into a malicious smile. This Drakon was going to die.

He raised his hands and turned to stare at the Drakon with a piercing glare. The creature in question had slowed its advance, its wings flapping uncertainly as it regarded the storm with something like unease showing on its humanoid face. Harry took a deep breath, focussed his mind, and suddenly let out a cry of surprise as an uncontrolled blast of icy power rushed through him, threatening to tear away his very body with its raging fury. It was more power than Harry had ever felt before, more power than he knew existed, and it took all of Harry's might to heave it out of his body before it destroyed him.

At the same time, the Drakon had obviously decided to stop playing around and had moved in for the kill. It opened its mouth and another blast of invisible power roared through the air, whipping up snowflakes and gritty dirt. Harry's power left his hand at the same moment and he flung two blazing thunderbolts of emerald and violet faerie fire at the Drakon. The two spells collided and detonated in a roaring boom. Fire and ice smashed together and despite the awesome powers of the Drakon, ice prevailed and dispersed the fire

away as it lanced forward. The Drakon reared in surprise and was struck in the chest, the thunderbolt ripping into its body. It let out the loudest screech yet as it screamed in agony and its wings folded in as it collapsed to the ground, injured but still very much alive.

The clouds rumbled again and as a howling wind roared through the empty stadium, most of its occupants having fled a long time ago. Suddenly a beam of searing power cut through the dense snowfall, ripping through stone and dirt as the Drakon lashed out in pain. A section of the stadium shuddered and exploded in a bright wave of fire as Harry ducked, his eyes narrowed as he tried to avoid the Drakon's furious counterattack. A shockwave of pure power blasted from the Drakon and Harry braced himself, pouring his new found power into a defensive spell that surrounded him like a cocoon of fiery ice, deflecting the power away from him.

Harry suddenly sensed a tremendous amount of magic building up in the creature and he bared his teeth in rage, his eyes bright with bloodlust as a malicious smile came over his face. Without hesitation, Harry distanced himself from his magic and let Meciél weave it into an unknown yet strangely delicate spell. Icy power roared in his veins as Meciél directed Harry's hand forward, sharply gesturing at the ground. The end results of the spell were the complete opposite of its creation, all force and no subtlety, and frozen earth ripped up and exploded in geysers of ice. The Drakon roared in agony and the magic it had collected abruptly dissipated as its fiery eyes widened in shock. Large gleaming icicles of pure white ice had lanced from the ground and impaled themselves on the ancient creature, ripping into its wings and legs and holding it in place. Suddenly an aura of smoky fire surrounded the Drakon, licking at the gleaming icicles in a desperate attempt by the Drakon to unbind itself, but either Harry's enhanced spell was too strong for it or the pain and wounds were affecting the Drakon's ability to cast spells, because the icicles shimmered but remained firm.

The clouds rumbled again and suddenly Harry felt a jolt of weariness strike at him. The massive rush of power within him was slowly fading and he grunted, hesitance on his face.

‘We need to finish this now,’ Meciél urged. ‘While the Drakon is weak and we are strong.’

‘What should we do?’ Harry growled, claspings his wand tightly as he peered through the falling snow at the struggling Drakon, whose fiery aura was beginning to send cracks through the icicles pinning it down. ‘I hurled the strongest blast of power I could at it and it’s not dead! I doubt I can do it again when the power is already leaving me!’

‘The storm!’ Meciél hissed. ‘It’s Maeve’s work, her contribution to the battle. She summoned it for a reason! Use it! Tap into its power and destroy this Drakon!’

Harry frowned as he looked up and he cocked his head, staring at the rumbling clouds. As if Maeve were watching him, the clouds rumbled again and a flash of lightning lanced down. There was a concussive boom and one of the nearby boulders shattered in a blast of heat, and suddenly Harry had an idea. He took a deep breath and with an unspoken incantation, he summoned his sword back into his hands, holding it up towards the sky, and he braced himself as Maeve responded.

There was another flash of lightning and a boom resounded through the stadium as a bright bolt of lightning lanced down at struck the tip of Harry’s sword. Harry gave a cry of pain as yet another type of power shot into him, raw, intense and utterly wild. He gritted his teeth as he fought and conquered the lightning bolt, entrapping it within his sword just as the lightning flashed again and again and again. The storm whipped around him, nature’s fury struggling to break free as Harry’s mind slowly bent under the pressure. The sword was glowing with a bright blue light, shuddering and hissing as it vibrated in Harry’s hand. Every particle of the sword and Harry’s hand was twitching in shock as he, with great effort, forced and bound the lightning into the sword

With great strain, Harry slowly lowered the glowing and shaking sword, his teeth clenched with sweat dripping down his forehead. Distantly, he could hear Meciél say something but his entire mind was focussed on containing the power. The blizzard raged around him as

he dragged the brightly glowing sword down, the wind roaring in his ears, and levelled it out until the tip of the sword was pointing at the entrapped Drakon.

‘Now!’ Meciél roared.

‘NOW!’ A familiar feminine voice boomed in his ears.

Harry released his numb and shaking hands from the sword and fell to the ground as the sword shot forward with great force, searing through the air like a bolt of glowing lightning. It lanced out at the Drakon, gave on last roar as it produced the final vestiges of its power, a concussive cone of roaring magma and power, and levelled it at the sword. The sword broke through the globe of magma and shattered it, glowing with blue arcs of electricity and the icy white shine of Winters power, and is struck the Drakon.

There was an enormous roaring boom that made Harry’s ears ring and a massive flash of light that seared into his eyes and he curled up on the ground as a loud series of shrieking hisses echoed in the stadium. A powerful gust of wind shot through the stadium, lifting up stray dirty and crumbled rocks, while the clouds rumbled again. Harry didn’t see a massive explosion of white and blue fire blaze in the centre of the stadium and he didn’t see coils of wild lightning lashing out from the explosions, tearing into wood and rock, leaving molten gouges or flickering fires in their tracks.

The flash of intense light and the piercing loud screech seemed to go on forever, but it was most likely only ten or so seconds, before it suddenly died down. Harry blinked, feeling nothing but weariness and aches in his body as he rolled over, gritting his teeth at the small cuts on his back from the flying debris. The first thing he felt was the sun on his face and he looked up to see that the massive storm clouds were quickly dissipating. He licked his lips and turned his gaze to the middle of the stadium. There was no trace of the Drakon, not even a corpse, and in the centre of the ground was a large jagged hole, with cracks running through rocks and ground. The stadium itself was damaged, whole sections had been ripped out and several were still on fire, but Harry didn’t care as a smug smile curved his lips upwards.

He flopped back down on the ground and distantly, he saw a horde of crimson-robed wand-wizards storming into the stadium, their wands out and their faces grim. Following them was the furious figure of Dumbledore, who nursed a large bloody gash on his head, followed by Moody, who limped in with a livid expression, searching for a foe. Something flickered in the corne of his eye and Harry redirected his gaze down at the ground, at one of the quickly-melting puddles of snow. Maeve's face peered back at him, a smile curving her lips as her slanted eyes glittered with an unknown emotion As Harry closed his eyes and allowed the weariness to take over him, comforted by Meciél's warm glow that quickly enveloped his bruised body, he heard the Winter Lady's words in his ear, sounding oddly sinister.

‘A bargain made and a service lent, now the price must be met.’

“It was a close one,” Amanda said, watching Harry with concerned blue eyes as he lay back in the hospital bed with a gruff and annoyed expression on his face.

It had only been a day since the First Task and the incident with the Drakon and despite the fact that Harry had been awake for over a day, the Matron still insisted on keeping in here. Harry wouldn't have cared either way, but the greying witch had apparently learnt her lesson from Harry's last stay in the hospital wing and now kept a constant eye on him, accompanied by a few charms that Meciél had recognised as basic security and alarm spells. This meant that he couldn't even leave his bed to go to the toilet without Pomfrey barging in on him- and unfortunately, he knew that from personal experience.

“Are you okay?” asked Amanda, her face scrunching up as she peered forward intently. “You look a little sick. Do you want me to call Pomfrey?”

“God no,” Harry snapped out quickly and Amanda blinked at his vehemence. “I've seen enough of her to last a lifetime and she's seen enough of me to keep her fantasies working for the next century or two.”

“Right,” Amanda said slowly, a puzzled frown coming over her face, but she shook her head in bemusement and brushed Harry's strange reaction aside, much like she did the insults he had thrown her way when she had arrived and refused to leave. “Anyway, Bagman- he gave you a perfect ten, said that you had fought against the rogue dragon commendably for somebody of your age. Maxine gave you a ten as well, said you probably saved the lives of a lot of people...even if she wasn't sure how you did it.”

Here she gave Harry a curious gaze, showing that even she was a little uncertain of how he had summoned a blizzard to aid him in the middle of a relatively warm day, but Harry merely cocked an eyebrow, looking amused, and she sighed and went on.

“Now, Dumbledore- when the mediwizards were done with him- he gave you a six,” She said and bit her lip, strangely hesitant and

rushed on. "He said that while you fought well, you also 'displayed the common recklessness of youth and were unaware of the lasting consequences of your actions'. I don't think anybody understood what he was talking about."

"Nobody usually does," Harry jibed, but his heart obviously wasn't in it as a pensive frown came over his face. "What the hell does that mean?"

'I believe Dumbledore may know of your bargain with the Winter Lady beloved,' Meciél offered quietly.

"Yes Meciél, I sort of got that," Harry said lamely, feeling a flash of amusement at Amanda's suddenly wary stance as she edged away from him. "I was talking about "common recklessness of youth" and "lasting consequences."

' ' Perhaps he knows of the details of your bargain and disapproves?' Meciél considered thoughtfully. 'You did agree to give your first born to the Winter Court, and there is a certain power behind such an offering.'

' No, I agreed to knock Maeve up,' Harry thought silently, an annoyed frown coming over his face.

'Hence, allowing Maeve to bear a child into the world, which will be your first born, which she will be allowed to keep,' Meciél explained and Harry made a face.

"Do you have to do that?" Amanda cut into his mental conversation with a slightly annoyed and nervous expression on her face. "Talk to it...um...her...out loud like that?"

Harry stared at her with a blank expression on his face before he rolled his eyes as a mischievous smirk crossed his face.

"So Meciél," He said slowly but loudly, eying the wall as if it were the most interesting. "What do you think of the weather? Ah, yeah, me

too. So, doing anything tonight? You're not...say, do you want to come over to my place? I'll bring the booze...honest!

Amanda stared at him with irritation brewing in her blue eyes as Harry continued his charade with a bright smile on his face.

"No, no, that's all for know...just wanted to freak out the blonde-haired brat...yes, I know, I'm a bastard...hey, one more thing...show me what you're wearing underneath that? Ooh, is that real silk?"

"You. Are. Horrible," Amanda stated firmly but she shook her head and continued on. "Anyway, Karkaroff gave you a two. He said that you didn't manage to retrieve the golden egg and that was the whole point of the task."

"Git," Harry muttered and Amanda nodded furiously.

'I thought you didn't care about the tournament,' Meciell thought dryly.

"Oh, I don't," Harry said quickly. "But c'mon, I just took on a freaking Drakon of all things. I'd like to get a little feedback of how it went, and since I wasn't reduced to a little smear on the ground, then I'm pretty sure I'm worth more than a two."

"Seriously, do you really have to do that?" Amanda asked sternly. "You sound insane talking to yourself like that."

"I, like, seriously, do," Harry snapped back in an atrocious American accent and gestured at Amanda with an impatient wave of his hand. "Well, go on. What score did your sister give me?"

Amanda hesitated but at Harry's annoyed expression, sighed and spoke.

"Molly gave you a one," She said, speaking quickly as if she was in a rush. At Harry's raised eyebrows, she quickly elaborated. "She said she knew what you had done to summon the blizzard and the lightning and strongly disapproved of it. She said, like Karkaroff, you

didn't retrieve the egg and that most of the magic you used was dark, which was against the rules. She tried to give you a zero, but the minimum score was one."

"Bitch," Harry muttered and Amanda's head shot up, her eyes widening with indignation. He rolled his eyes. "Not you, Molly."

"I'm what?" Came a crystal-cool voice and Amanda started as she spun around as Molly stalked into the hospital wing. Her face flickered with disapproval as she saw Amanda sitting by his bed. Amanda fidgeted guiltily under her sister's gaze but kept her head high and the frown on Molly's face deepened.

"I said, you were a bitch," Harry answered cheerfully, not at all concerned with the unexpected interruption. "I mean, that Drakon was there to kill me because it wanted your father dead. 'For the Knight to die, so must you', remember? You could have at least given me a few points for...oh, I don't know, saving your life again?"

"I know what you did," Molly said coldly. "Amanda, get away from him. You have no idea what he has allied himself with."

Amanda frowned but rose from the chair and went to stand by her sister's side. She avoided Harry's gaze as if she expected him to be angry at her but Harry didn't seem to care and he glanced at Molly as she continued.

"I know what you did," Molly continued, breathing harshly as she struggled to contain her anger...and was that fear Harry could see in her eyes? "You used Winter's power to kill that thing. You made a deal with the Winter Fae."

"Wow, just...wow," Harry said mockingly. "You're right, I'm guilty. Lock me up, throw away the keys and drop the soap. "

Molly gritted her teeth and Amanda stared at him with sudden comprehension as Harry continued.

“Why the hell do you care anyway?” He asked with genuine curiosity. “I mean, the Drakon is dead. You’re alive. Your sister is alive. I’m alive...not that you care. Meciél’s alive. Dumbledore’s alive, and according to the graffiti around my apartment, so is Jesus. It’s all good in your little prim and proper world.”

“I...that’s none of your damned business,” Molly started, lashing out as she narrowed her eyes at him. “What did you bargain with, hmm? Who did you bargain with?”

“I bargained with a High Sidhe named Maeve,” Harry answered truthfully. “And as for what I bargained with, well, that’s my damned business...hey, wait. I get it, damned business. Oh, you’re good...what, was that a metaphor, an analogy? Or is that a pun? You know, I never was any good at English.”

Molly, however, ignored Harry’s mocking words and took a step back, her face paling as her hand flew up to her mouth. She looked completely and utterly shocked as she shook her head wordlessly at Harry.

“You made a bargain with the Winter Lady?” She asked in a whisper. “What have you gotten yourself into?”

“Oh, piss off,” Harry snapped, suddenly feeling annoyed at her criticism, although a part of him was wondering the same thing. “My ‘damned’ business, remember?” He stopped and cocked his head. “You know, that was pretty good. The whole ‘damned’ thing. I’m going to have to remember that one.”

To her credit, Amanda managed to roll her eyes at Harry, although she mirrored a weaker version of her sister’s shock, mixed with quite a lot of confusion, as if she didn’t fully understand what was going on.

“Anyway, why the hell does your father have a Drakon gunning after him?” Harry asked bluntly, changing the subject. “I mean, they’re pretty powerful creatures and there’s only, what, two or three dozen of them in existence?”

“Daddy once killed a Drakon,” Amanda answered, ignoring her sister’s annoyed frown. “It had kidnapped our Mom for its rituals. Daddy went in, saved her, killed the Drakon and married her.”

“It’s like a fucking fairytale,” Harry muttered to himself, shaking his head in disbelief. “Only I don’t have a plucky sidekick to provide the comedy relief.”

It was at this moment that Dumbledore strolled into the hospital wing, a benign smile on his face and his eyes glittering cheerfully behind his glasses. He wore a long gown of purple cloth covered with twinkling stars and bright silver moons. Harry also noticed that the end of his robes had been tucked into his mismatched and extremely ugly socks.

“Oh, I don’t think so,” Harry said loudly, shaking his head quickly and waving his finger in front of him in a vaguely reprimanding gesture. “I asked for a plucky sidekick, not the bloody court jester.”

“Ah, Mr Potter, Ms Carpenter and Professor Carpenter,” greeted Dumbledore cheerfully, ignoring Harry’s strange outburst. His eyes twinkled as he took in Harry’s visitors. “Good afternoon to you all. It is quite good to see you up and about, Harry.”

Harry frowned as Dumbledore strode into the room and automatically tensed when the old man produced his wand, giving it a short, sharp wave. He blinked in surprise as a comfortable armchair materialised from thin air with a soft creaking noise. Dumbledore’s wand disappeared as quickly as it had appeared and the elderly wizard sat down in his chair, folding his hands together.

“Now, firstly, I believe this belongs to you.” Dumbledore began, reaching into his robes with one gnarled hand and pulling at a small golden egg. “Congratulations on your performance for the First Task, Harry. I do not believe that the Drakon was expecting such a fierce defence from one as young as you.”

Harry made a face but accepted the golden egg, throwing it carelessly aside. It landed on the edge of his bed and slipped down

onto the ground with a loud cracking noise, but Harry didn't even look down as his eyes met Dumbledore's fearlessly.

"So, you know what it was," He said flatly, ignoring the two silent girls and concentrating on the Headmaster.

"I do now," Dumbledore said lightly and absently touched his head as his blue eyes misted over. "I will admit that the creature caught me off guard. Thankfully, Fawkes was there to save me once again. I daresay that I shall never hear the end of this one."

"How the hell did one of them get past your wards?" Harry growled, anger seeping into his voice, but Dumbledore didn't appear to care as a pensieve frown came over his face.

"I have started an inquiry into the whole matter," the old wizard answered slowly. "However, because of the...nature...of the creature, I only have limited recourses at my disposal. To the Ministry and the rest of the world, they believe that one of the dragons broke free and went mad before you were able to subdue and defeat it. Of course, there are those who know better, but they are staying quiet about their suspicions until I have had a chance to investigate this incident myself."

"Wow," Harry declared flatly. "That was a rather long-winded way of saying 'I have no idea, Harry,' but don't worry about it. I have another question. Where the hell are..."

Harry trailed off as Dumbledore reached into his robes again and pulled out both Harry's wand and sword. Harry frowned at the subtle display of magic but took the weapons from Dumbledore, carefully inspecting them.

"I suppose it is my turn to ask a question," Dumbledore said lightly, his blue eyes watching Harry carefully as the boy ran a palm over the hilt of the rune-encrusted sword. "However, judging by the Drakon's words, I believe that you and I already know the answer to this one."

“Huh?” Amanda uttered softly, but winced when Molly jabbed her in the stomach with an elbow. She scowled at her sister but fell silent as Harry looked up, a cautious look on his face.

“This Nicodemus must be getting quite annoyed that he has been unable to fulfil his rather crude manner of revenge,” Dumbledore said and his voice turned serious, the smile slipping off his face. “Of course, he has tried. There have been no less than a half-a-dozen attempts by an unknown party to enter the school. Luckily, the additional wards I placed up after the first attack have been more than successful in prohibiting these unwelcome guests.”

“ Did you capture any of them?” Harry asked quickly, but Dumbledore was already shaking his head.

“Unfortunately, I did not,” Dumbledore answered and a light frown appeared on his face. “I can tell you that these attempts were made by a variety of creatures. Some were human, no more than mere muggles, I believe, but others appear to be akin to those nasty hounds you ran into on your first night here. There has only been a single attempt to enter by a Denarian, and all I can tell you is the intruder was apparently a male.”

“So, good old Nico decided to swindle a Drakon to do his dirty work for him,” Harry muttered and frowned. “He must be getting desperate. Drakon’s are sort of like mercenaries, in a way. You pay them enough and they’ll do whatever you want- providing you keep the goods flowing in.”

“What would you pay a Drakon?” Amanda spoke up again, her voice drifting over the pensieve men in the room. “I mean, it’s a...dragon.”

“They love wealth, they hoard it for their entire lifetime,” Harry shrugged. “It was probably promised and paid with a lot of glittery, shiny jewels or whatever. Or virgin women- take your pick.”

“Hmm,” Dumbledore muttered and stood up. “If you will excuse me Harry, you have suddenly reminded me of an errand I must complete.

However, there is still much we have to discuss. Shall I arrange a meeting, say, tomorrow morning after breakfast? My office?"

"Tomorrow's no good," Harry deadpanned. "I have to wash my hair."

"I see," Dumbledore said slowly, although Harry could have sworn he saw a flicker of annoyance in the old man's eyes and grinned.

"Yeah," Harry nodded. "Hey, this head is an apartment for two, you know. And you know how women are about their hair..."

'Excuse me?'

"I see," Dumbledore repeated, although there was a soft twinkle in his eyes as he stared down at the boy in the hospital gown. "Well then, I shall see to it that Madame Pomfrey does an excellent job on your hair. After all, you are in her care until she sees fit to release you, and showering alone is not suitable for somebody in such a delicate state."

Harry stared at the old man, frowned in annoyance and finally let out an annoyed sigh as he flipped the covers over. He jumped out of bed, his sword and wand still clasped in his hand, and levelled an annoyed glare at Dumbledore.

"That was cheap," He said flatly. "Fine, I'll be there, providing that you let me out of this burning inferno of sterilised hell."

"So, tomorrow after breakfast then?" Dumbledore prodded gently, a smile on his face. "I have your word on it?"

"Yeah, yeah," Harry muttered. "Now, where are my clothes?"

"There over here, Harry," Amanda offered and pointed to a small box under the bed, where all of Harry's clothes lay in a nicely folded pile.

With a wordless flick of his wand, Harry summoned the bundle of clothes to him and glanced around the room.

“But first, you go tell that perverted excuse you call a nurse that I’m allowed to leave,” Harry said flatly. “Or I won’t be responsible for the loss of Filch.”

“Filch?” Amanda asked with a frown.

“Yeah,” Harry said and smiled darkly. “After all, he’s the one who would have to clean up after me.”

Dumbledore merely smiled, his eyes twinkling jovially behind his half-moon glasses.

“There is no need for me to do that,” He said quietly. “Madame Pomfrey has already told me that you are in perfect health and you are free to leave as you wish.”

“But...” Harry started, but he just shook his head and let out a disgruntled frown. “Okay old man, I’m getting dressed. I already have my suspicions about you and your choice in perverted staff, so I think you should leave.”

“Very well, Harry,” was all Dumbledore said and without another word, the purpled-robed man strode from the room.

Moments later, a jovial whistle echoed down the hallway as Harry turned back to the two girls, looking at Amanda flatly.

“You should probably go as well,” He said and a mischievous smirk lit up his face. “I wouldn’t want to burst your virgin eyes with my devilish appearance.”

Amanda flushed in embarrassment, her mouth opening and closing wordlessly, while Harry turned his gaze towards Molly, who looked as if she were trying not to laugh at her sister.

“You can stay though,” Harry said and Molly blinked.

“I wouldn’t want to,” She said in disgust and she snatched Amanda’s arm and led her out of the hospital wing amidst Harry’s chuckles as he stripped off his hospital gown and reached for his clothes.

A little while later, Harry was striding through the halls of Hogwarts with a confident grin on his face. Since it was a Sunday, there were quite a few students roaming the school but whenever Harry came close to them, they would stop talking to their fellow classmates and stare at him with a wide array of emotions, including but not limited to awe, fear and nervousness. On the whole, Harry was enjoying the attention he was receiving.

‘I thought you despised being the centre of attention,’ Meciél thought in amusement.

“Only when people bug me about it,” Harry replied out loud, much to the confusion of two passing Ravenclaws, who stared at him oddly until he levelled a pointed glare at them and they scurried away. “I mean, I haven’t had one person come up to me with a stupid question so far. It’s looking good for me.”

‘Indeed.’

However, Harry’s beloved solitude took a blow when he entered the Gryffindor tower and was met with a roaring wave of cheers, cat-calls and laughter. He blinked, absently picking at his ears and winced at a particularly loud second-year girl screeched his name. He glanced around, seeing a brightly coloured banner bearing the words ‘HARRY POTTER: OUR CHAMPION!’ floating in the air above a group of clapping First Years. However, a lot of the older students who were more aware of just what had happened at the First Task were eying him carefully, and Harry could practically see the nervousness radiating from their bodies.

‘That, beloved, is true power,’ Meciél said smugly and Harry could feel that she was enjoying this as much as he was. ‘When you have

the ability to make others fear your abilities, you have a very potent form of control over them.”

Harry didn't respond but he allowed a smug smile to tug on his lips as he glanced around the room, watching the clapping students with amusement. They seemed to be enjoying themselves, and Harry couldn't have that.

“Why are you cheering?” He asked loudly, his voice cutting over the din in the Common Room. The noise died down as some of the students frowned and looked at each other in confusion.

“Because you won,” A second-year girl with dark hair offered hesitantly.

“So?” Harry shrugged as he clutched his egg to his side, his sword strapped over his back and his wand tucked into his pocket. “You didn't win, I did.”

“But...” The girl trailed off, looking very confused.

“You're a Gryffindor champion,” A fifth year boy with dark blonde hair said confidently. “You're one of us and you won.”

“No, you're one of you and I'm definitely one of me,” Harry said, making a tutting noise in the back of his throat. Around him, the smiles were fading away and Harry saw Amanda roll her eyes, clearly not impressed with him at the moment, but he couldn't have cared less.

“You're the second Hogwarts champion,” The fifth year boy continued, but his confident tone had been replaced with hesitance and confusion and he was looking very awkward.

“No, no, no, no, no,” Harry said quickly, wagging a finger in front of him. “I'm my own champion. I'm sure as hell not winning this for you lot. This is all about me.”

“You’re a Hogwarts student,” The boy protested. “If you win, Hogwarts wins!”

“That’s bullcrap,” Harry snorted and frowned. “Hmm, I can’t have that. Maybe I should start up my own school and recruit students from Hogwarts. Maybe, ‘Harry’s School of Witchcraft,’ no males? Yeah, that’d be great for me. Or, ‘Harry’s Institution of those with Brains? Of course, it’d have a poor attendance rate, since there aren’t that many intelligent people here at Hogwarts.”

Everybody was staring at him as Harry rolled his eyes, but from the corner came an annoyed sigh as Amanda stood up, almost immune to his scathing moods, and gestured at the golden egg clutched in his hands.

“So, what is it?” She asked impatiently and half of the room followed her finger down towards the gleaming golden orb in Harry’s hand. “That’s meant to tell you about the next task.”

“It tells me that I’ll be wrestling with a crazy old man and tiny little orange-skinned freaks before I can have my roast goose for dinner,” Harry retorted.

“What?” Ron said, a frown creasing his freckled face.

“You know, golden egg, giant goose, annoying little bint of a brat,” Harry said carelessly as he examined the egg carefully. “It’s a book. You know, old man disposes of annoying children and chooses a little sex-buddy. It was a classic, or so I’m told.”

“That’s really not what Charlie and the...” Hermione began, but Harry silenced her with a wave of his hand as his face grew intent, and he narrowed his eyes. There was a hairline crack in the egg and after feeling his way around the golden orb, he managed to open it up, and glanced eagerly inside.

He blinked, seeing nothing at all, just as a loud screeching wail slammed into his head. Students cried out in shock and surprise as

they clasped their hands over their ears. Harry flinched as well and slammed the thing shut, gingerly holding it out in front of him.

“Fucking hell,” He swore, shaking his head and blinking as the echoing remnants of the wail left his ears. “That was loud.”

“What was that?” Amanda asked, looking at the egg with wide eyes.

“Don’t know, don’t care,” Harry said and approached the staircase leading up to his dormitory. “Now, I know you lot seem to be having some kind of party here, but I’ve got a bit of headache, so if I have to come down hear to make you shut up, somebody’s going to legs broken. Okay?”

Some of the students laughed nervously as Harry swung around and walked up the staircase, but many of them gulped, and Harry couldn’t help but smirk as he entered the dorm.

“Fucking egg,” He muttered as he threw the thing down on his bed. “Stupid wailing piece of crap.”

‘You do know what that noise was, do you not?’ Meciél asked.

“Other than a free headache provider, not a damn clue,” Harry muttered, rubbing his temples with his hands. An instant later, he sighed in pleasure as a throbbing warm sensation soothed into his head and let a lazy grin come over his face as he flopped down on his bed.

‘That was a language, beloved,’ Meciél continued as she soothed Harry’s head. ‘An inhuman language, of course, but still a language.’

“Really?” Harry muttered out loud, feeling his eyes blinking over with sleepiness.

‘Yes,’ Meciél answered. ‘And, I can translate it for you.’

Harry allowed a smirk to cross his face as he nestled into his large and fluffy pillows.

“Okay, but do it in ten minutes or so,” He murmured. “You’re a real temptress, you know.”

‘

“I don’t like poetry,” Harry muttered some time later, but a pensieve frown was on his face as both he and Meciél absorbed the screeching wails, which suddenly seemed to make sense to Harry as he listened in to the poetry. “What the hell does that mean anyway?”

‘The language is that of the merepeople,’ Meciél informed him, her voice thoughtful in his ear. ‘They are the scion of Fae- Selkies and Sirens, to be precise. They are water-based creatures, although they do not possess any noteworthy powers.’

“You’ve had dealings with them before?” Harry asked as he studied the egg closely, frowning pensively.

‘ I have not,’ Meciél answered. ‘However, the wand-magic knowledge I accumulated for you contained some of the more basic facts about the creatures and I was able to quickly deduce the rest. I am quite intelligent, you know.’

“And so modest,” Harry muttered, but his heart really wasn’t into it. “So, these mermaids are going to take something I’ll ‘sorely miss’ and I only get an hour to look for it before I never see it again.”

‘ So it would seem,’ Meciél answered.

“What would I sorely miss though?” Harry pondered out loud, frowning. A thought suddenly struck him and he stiffened, sitting up right on his bed. “You don’t think...”

‘The coin,’ Meciél said, and she too sounded worried.

“Oh, they’ll have to kill me before I let them take that away from me,” Harry muttered darkly and he felt a flare of dark power sear into

him as Meciél concurred with his statement. "Preferably, I'll kill them first."

'It could be something else, though,' Meciél mused. 'But there aren't too many things that you would sorely miss if they were taken away from you. You wand, perhaps, but I do not think that they would take that away from you for the tournament. The sword, maybe.'

"Hmph," Harry snorted and reached on his bed, gripping the hilt of his gleaming sword tightly. "I guess I'll have to be on guard."

'In more ways than one, beloved,' Meciél said and Harry frowned.

"What do you mean?" He asked.

'There is something else happening, something beyond the apparent motives of our enemies,' Meciél said softly. 'Even though Nicodemus may have loved his daughter, his desire for revenge here is far too inconsistent with his personality. It is like Cessbulby said, he is acting irrational and much unlike himself. I will not believe that Nicodemus would give up his hard-earned powerbase for the sake of vengeance.'

"Oh?" Harry uttered, listening carefully.

'And there was the Drakon,' Meciél continued passionately and Harry could feel her complex mind whirring as she tried to piece the clues and facts together. 'I also will not believe that one of the Ancient Drakon's of the Old World would put itself in such danger merely for the sake of vengeance, not matter what it was promised or given.'

"A conspiracy?" Harry asked shrewdly, but he frowned. "Against who? Me? The Knight? The brats?"

'I believe somebody- or something- wants the Knights dead,' Meciél answered. 'The Drakon was sent to kill you because you were protecting the Knight and his family I do not believe it would have bothered you otherwise if you had not chosen to fulfil your debt.'

“Well, I don’t really care about the Knight,” Harry said, shrugging carelessly. “And my debt to the family is gone, so, I say good luck to them.”

‘You do not understand, beloved,’ Meciél said, a touch impatiently. ‘Anduriel- Nicodemus’ Fallen- is one of the most powerful Fallen, a rival to me. A Drakon is a very ancient and very powerful creature. Both would not let themselves be used as a weapon like this unless somebody was directing their actions. It would take a very powerful being, more powerful than anything you have encountered before, to manipulate both of them like this, and you, beloved- you have publicly declared yourself against this being;’

“Fuck,” Harry muttered and sighed, sagging down onto the bed. “What, you think we might be getting a little out of our depths here?”

‘Only a little, beloved,’ Meciél remarked dryly. ‘If this being has the power to influence a Drakon and Nicodemus, then I believe you do not have the power to combat this threat. You were only able to beat that Drakon by temporarily borrowing Maeve’s power- and do not think she will let you use it again without paying a much higher price.’

“Yeah, yeah,” Harry muttered. “You know, I was in such a good mood before.”

“Er...Harry?” Somebody called and Harry blinked, his eyes flicking up to the door where Ron had just entered, a bottle of drink in his hand and a nervous expression on his face.

“Yes?” Harry replied testily and waited as Ron fidgeted under his gaze.

“Um...who...who are you talking to?” Ron asked slowly, peering around the room and scratching his head in confusion.

“My parents,” Harry remarked dryly after a moments pause. “I was talking to my parents, Ron.”

“Er...” Ron looked lost and he blushed, the tips of his ears flaming up. “Aren’t they...well, dead?”

“Your point?” Harry remarked coldly and Ron gulped at the decidedly dangerous look in the eyes of the boy in front of him.

“No point,” He said quickly and shuffled on his feet. Harry continued to stare at the redhead until, at last, the freckled-face Weasley received the message and quickly backed away, fumbling for the doorknob.

“Well, um...I’ll...just leave,” Ron finished lamely and practically bolted out of the room.

The moment he was gone, Harry let out a cold smile and rolled his eyes.

“Moron,” He muttered to himself, and in his mind he felt Meciél give a pulse of amusement.

‘Your parents?’ She repeated.

“Yeah, well, it’s the kinda sentimental sappy shit everybody expects,” Harry remarked. “And it gives me a great excuse for talking to you out loud.”

‘You could simply speak to me in your mind,’ Meciél offered.

“Where’s the fun in that?” Harry asked, and then frowned at the golden egg. “Anyway, back to the egg. These mermaids...what can I expect?”

‘I do not know a lot, so I suggest that you do some research,’ Meciél said. ‘However, they are creatures of the oceans and lakes, so you may need to go for a little swim to complete this task.’

“A swim?” Harry asked sceptically.

‘Yes, beloved, a swim,’ Meciél repeated. ‘Now, there are several methods that can be used to help people breathe underwater. I suggest that you go for a charm at first, but remember that your demonic form can also be used...although I suggest you wait until you’re out of the eyes and ears of the audience. Now, the charm I am talking about is called a bubblehead charm. Although it is usually used to block out and purify bad odours and gases, it can be modified to act as a water-repellent...’

The next morning, Harry donned his casual clothes, made several biting comments to Ron and Neville, amused himself by talking to Meciél in Amanda's presence and causing the blonde to leave him alone and finally walked down to the Great Hall for a meal. His stomach was rumbling as the aroma of hot cooked food filled his nostrils and he let out an impatient sigh as he quickened his step.

'That is what you get for missing dinner,' Meciél lectured, but Harry made a dismissive noise and mentally swatted her words away as he strode into the Great Hall.

Instantly, the noise dimmed down and Harry blinked, stopping as hundreds of eyes swung in his direction. There were muttering and whispers from all of the tables, including the Durmstrang, Beauxbatons and Salem students. Harry took this all in as he strode to the Gryffindor table, basking in the fear and awe his presence seemed to be generating. There was a huge grin on his face as he came around to his usual spot, and he sighed in mock modesty.

"I am a god among men," He said loudly as he sat down at the table.

"More like a git among men," Amanda muttered from the other side of the table, but she reflexively flinched when Harry's eyes shot upwards towards her and she quickly looked away, surprised that he had heard her.

"Hey...er...Harry?" A red-haired girl spoke up and Harry glanced at her with irritation, trying to ponder her name. She was Ron's sister, that's all Harry could remember, and she blushed under Harry's piercing gaze as she handed him a newspaper. "You're on the front page."

Harry blinked and looked down, ignoring the girl's lingering presence. He flipped the paper over while reaching for a slice of toast and nibbled on the crust as he read.

First Task or Last Task?

Dragon Goes Mad and Attacks Harry Potter!

By Rita Skeeter

When the students of Hogwarts were given permission to watch the five champions contend in the first task of the newly reinstated Triwizard Tournament, they had little idea that they themselves would become part of the task. Ministry officials were stunned when the main obstacle of the first task- a dragon- broke free and wreaked a trail of devastation over the Hogwarts Quidditch stadium. Although no students received anything other than minor injuries, four dragon handlers and two Aurors from the Department Magical Law Enforcement were transferred to Saint Mungo's with serious injuries, with several of the wizards near death.

The First Task required that the champions retrieve a fake 'golden' egg from a pile of real dragon eggs while avoiding the claws and flames of the nesting mother. Although the first four champions were able to complete this task without incident, when controversial fifth champion Harry Potter (commonly known for his defeat of You-Know-Who as a baby) stepped up, all hell seemed to break loose. The nesting mother, a Hungarian horntail, broke free of its bonds and began to attack anything in its path. Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts, was unsuccessful in subduing the beast and was rendered unconscious as the dragon turned to the Boy-Who-Lived and attacked. In a spectacular show of magic and in the midst of a freak snowstorm, Harry Potter drew forward a bolt of lightning and delivered a fatal blow against the raging beast.

There has been much confusion over the exact nature of the incident. Several witnesses claimed to have heard a voice shouting down at Potter that he must be killed, while others spoke of some form of shape-shifting Dragon. These witnesses were examined by a mediwizard and a mindhealer soon after giving their accounts. However, several witnesses, including Ministry Official Bartermius Crouch, spoke of Harry Potter using dark magic as he fought to subdue the dragon.

“At the moment, we can ascertain through various eyewitness accounts that Harry Potter used several pieces of powerful dark magic,” an anonymous Ministry official stated. “Including, but not

limited to, an attempt at a Killing Curse. This, of course, would be troubling even if Harry Potter was a normal fourteen-year-old boy, but this is the Boy-Who-Lived!”

A preliminary Ministry enquiry into the incident has found that the use of dark magic in such dire circumstances was acceptable. However, many upstanding wizards and witches have expressed concern over the troublesome actions of the famous teenager. Harry Potter is most famous for his defeat of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named after he both survived and deflected the previously thought unblockable Killing Curse. That our hero has knowledge of such dark magic has worrying implications for both Harry Potter and his classmates.

“Potter is, well, he’s really cruel to everybody,” said Draco Malfoy, a fourth year Hogwarts student. “He snaps at everybody, treats everybody like dirt- even the professor’s- and Dumbledore just lets him do it. It doesn’t surprise me that he knows dark magic at all. He seems a bit insane, to be honest.”

Harry Potter was labelled as missing, presumed deceased, at the age of seven when his guardians’ house was attacked with powerful and unknown dark magic. Potter’s relatives, including his Aunt, Uncle and seven-year-old cousin, were all killed in the attack and it had been assumed that Potter had perished as well. His sudden re-emergence in the Wizarding World took place no less than a month ago, when he suddenly arrived at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, alongside companion and possible girlfriend Amanda Carpenter, a student from Salem’s Institute for Witches. Since then, Potter has seemingly been under the protection of Headmaster Albus Dumbledore, who has used his considerable political influence in delaying all attempts by the Ministry to question Potter over his whereabouts and his recollection of the murder of his family. Nobody knows where Harry Potter was for the past seven years, nobody knows who he was with and nobody knows who taught him such terrible dark magic. What we do know is that Harry Potter is a dangerous and troubled youth and must be properly examined before we allow him to study side-by-side with our children...

“Huh,” Harry muttered, but there was a dark frown on his face as he peered over the Gryffindor table and towards the Slytherin one, where Malfoy was holding a newspaper and pointing to the front cover with a smug expression on his face. His pale grey eyes met Harry’s dark stare and his smile faded as he shifted in his seat. Harry continued to hold his gaze until the platinum-haired boy dropped the paper and hastily turned his head away, striking up a conversation with a pretty fifth year.

“Did you really use dark magic?” Hermione asked from across the table, a wary frown on her face as she edged away from him. “The Daily Prophet usually makes a lot of stuff up but it sounded really convincing.”

“You didn’t stay to watch?” Harry asked mockingly and was rewarded with a partly guilty and partly angry flush. He gave Hermione an arrogant smile and cocked his head. “As for the paper—well, it’s mostly true. Take careful note of the “cruel” and “mean” part.”

“So it was dark magic,” Ron breathed. Harry saw Neville and the red-haired girl shrink away from him and felt a flash of amusement. Hermione was staring at him as if he had just declared that he kicked small puppies down the street for amusement. A grin crossed his face at that thought and he decided to voice it.

“You look like I just told you that I kick small puppies down the street for my own amusement,” Harry declared and ignored Meciél’s sigh of exasperation at his thought processes.

“You use dark magic!” Hermione exclaimed loudly and several students from down the table looked up at the small group.

“And?” Harry asked after a pause, sounding genuinely confused.

“And...it’s illegal!” Hermione snapped, looking scandalised. “And...it’s—it’s wrong!”

“Maybe here, but not where I lived,” Harry lied easily and met Hermione’s glare squarely, pasting an expression of extreme

boredom and apathy on his face. “Besides, does this look like the face of somebody who cares?”

Hermione frowned and bit her lip. She seemed to be having some kind of internal debate and after a few seconds, she reached a decision and backed off, watching him warily. Harry shook his head and smiled, turning back to his breakfast.

‘See Meciél, no torture needed,’ Harry thought as he delved into his breakfast. ‘Just a healthy dose of fear.’

‘My way would have achieved the same result,’ Meciél said petulantly. ‘And it would have been more fun.’

‘Well, I’m sorry then,’ Harry thought sarcastically.

‘You should be.’

‘I am.’

‘Good.’

‘Fine then.’

‘I am not playing this childish game with you, beloved,’ Meciél stated in amusement, but there was a tone of finality in her words.

‘You do that,’ Harry thought smugly.

‘Beloved...’ Meciél started in exasperation.

“That’s my name, don’t wear it out,” Harry said loudly.

‘Technically, beloved isn’t...’

“I wasn’t talking to you,” Harry said once again and turned around, his eyes refocussing and staring at McGonagall, who paused in mid-

sentence, her lips thinly pursed as she stared at him with a disapproving frown on her face.

“Mr Potter,” She greeted coolly. “I’m glad to see you’re back with us. Professor Dumbledore wants to remind you that you have a meeting with him right after breakfast.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Harry muttered and turned around, focussing back on his breakfast.

“Mr Potter...” McGonagall began angrily but she was interrupted when Harry let out a loud sigh of irritation.

“Alright, I got the message,” Harry snapped without turning around. “Dumbledore’s office. After breakfast. Bring lube. Call a Rape Counsellor.”

McGonagall’s mouth opened and closed, her eyes wide with shock and surprise. She seemed to have been stunned to a standstill by Harry’s comments and his casual disregard for one of the most powerful wizards on the planet, and Harry sighed and stood up.

“I’ll just go now,” He said, throwing down his cutlery. “It’ll save me hearing a boring lecture on manners and civility that I’m obviously not going to pay attention to.”

Harry wore a disgruntled expression as he walked through Hogwarts, ignoring the cheery voices of the portraits as they chatted with each other. Luckily for him, Meciell possessed an amazingly good memory and he was able to find his way to the entrance to the Headmaster’s office. He stopped in front of the stone gargoyle and sighed when it didn’t move.

“Move it,” He snapped, but the gargoyle remained still. Harry rolled his eyes, a frown on his face as he contemplated blowing the thing up.

‘That would not look good,’ Meciell said in amusement. ‘Although I believe the Daily Prophet would enjoy the spectacle- Boy-Who-Lived

Murders Innocent Gargoyle- Dumbledore Involved in Cover Up. It would be a best-seller for sure.'

"Oh, you're funny," Harry muttered. "Besides, best-sellers are books, not newspapers."

He glared at the gargoyle with irritation in his eyes and made to turn away, when he heard a grating noise. He turned back and saw that the statue had jumped aside, revealing a stairway. With heavy footsteps, he trumped up the stairs, opened the door and walked inside.

The room was just as he, or Meciél, remembered it. There were shelves full of strange devices, many of them moving, and large bookshelves crammed with faded books. The walls were covered in portraits, many who seemed to be sleeping, although Harry could have sworn he saw some of them peeking from out of their eyelids. Dumbledore was sitting behind his desk, his beard and large purple hat obscuring most of his face as he clutched a quill, scrawling down something on a blank piece of parchment.

"Dumbledore," Harry greeted curtly and moved forward to flop himself down in one of the chairs, leaning back and enjoying whatever charms that made the thing so comfortable.

"Ah, Harry," Dumbledore greeted kindly and he looked up, dropping the quill and pushing away the scroll. "You are earlier than I anticipated. How are you this fine morning?"

Harry shrugged in response and with a cocked eyebrow, he met Dumbledore's eyes as he placed his feet up on Dumbledore's desk, a cocky smile on his face as if he dared Dumbledore to disapprove. The portraits tutted loudly but he ignored both them and Meciél's exasperated sigh and watched as Dumbledore noticed the motion. The Headmaster's eyes twinkled but he made no comment as they flew back to Harry, who looked a little disgruntled that he hadn't gotten any reaction.

“I have much to discuss with you, Harry,” Dumbledore began. “I presume that you are feeling well again?”

“As good as an underage hooker on a Friday night,” Harry responded cheerfully, making Dumbledore blink.

“Now,” Dumbledore continued, deciding to ignore Harry’s comment. “I have had a lot of request and some, if I may say so myself, not-so-subtle threats from various persons within the Ministry of Magic, especially from the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, who wish to bring you in for questioning over both the First Task and other various matters.”

“Oh?” Harry uttered but his entire body tensed and his mind sought out the dark power resting on the edge of his consciousness, ready to grasp it at any moment.

“Luckily, I have been able to persuade most of them that I am the best suited in this particular matter and they are content to leave it to me,” Dumbledore said, making Harry blink in surprise.

“You have, have you?” He asked suspiciously.

“Yes,” Dumbledore answered simply. “So, now, there is much we have to discuss. First, there is the matter of the magic you used during the First Task. Granted, you were trying to defend yourself, but several people witnessed your attempt at an Unforgivable Curse, your use of both a devastation curse and a pulverizing curse. These are two powerful pieces of dark magic, Harry, and quite illegal.”

“It was a Drakon,” Harry said bluntly, annoyed at Dumbledore’s disapproving tone. “I needed to think big. Besides, none of the curses worked anyway.”

“No, Harry, you misunderstand me,” Dumbledore said slowly, watching Harry with periwinkle eyes. “It is not your actions during the First Task that are being questioned. It has already been found by the Ministry that your actions were justified in light of the circumstances. Alastor Moody was also cleared for his use of the Killing Curse.”

“Then what’s the problem?” Harry asked with a puzzled frown on his face.

“It is not your actions that trouble the Ministry but rather than your knowledge and how you came to possess it,” answered Dumbledore and looked over his half-moon glasses with a slightly questioning expression.

Harry didn’t say anything but tapped the side of his head meaningfully with his finger, giving a rather secretive and sly smile. Dumbledore saw this and let out a wearied sigh.

“As I suspected, considering what she is,” He murmured softly, almost to himself, but he raised his voice as he continued. “You know that I cannot tell the Ministry of your...mentor, so to speak, lest they take you away and try to forcibly separate you. This, I believe, would be counterproductive to an eventual rehabilitation.”

“So, what are you going to tell them?” Harry asked rather politely, although he felt a wave of scorn rush through him as he regarded the figure in front of him.

‘That old geezer is deluded if he thinks I’ll ever settle for rehabilitation,’ he spoke into his mind, and felt Meciél’s strong approval as her presence washed over his consciousness, reassuring him and making him listen to Dumbledore’s next words.

“I have devised a back-story of your past that I believe will satisfy them,” Dumbledore said, his eyes twinkling. “There was once a rather infamous freelance Auror called Gareth McGregor who was known for both his knowledge of dark magic and his steadfast dedication for all that is good. He has a rather infamous reputation for his work with the Department of Magical Law Enforcement during the time of Lord Voldemort’s first uprising. He was, unfortunately, killed seven years ago on a mission in Albania, seeking out the dark forces on my behalf.”

“Wow,” Harry said flatly. “Your story is both riveting and original. Please, continue, continue.”

“Pay attention, Harry,” Dumbledore said firmly and continued, “Now, there are very few who know that Gareth is dead. He had no family and very few friends. Those who do know can be trusted to keep silent about the matter. With this in mind, it could be quite believable that you were taken from the Dursley’s by Gareth when rogue Dark Wizards attacked your house and hence, have lived with him ever since. He, unfortunately, perished three months ago and therefore, you accompanied Ms Carpenter, a close family friend, to Hogwarts and were bound into the tournament. As long as you are careful with your tongue and the Fallen Meciél is careful in her defence of your mind, this story can hold.”

‘This man is very good, beloved,’ Meciél murmured in approval.

“Why are you doing this?” Harry asked softly, staring at Dumbledore in a mixture of puzzlement and suspicion. “Why go all the way for somebody you don’t even know will reform, somebody who could one day be your enemy?”

“I have my reasons, Harry,” Dumbledore said softly, stroking his beard with a gnarled hand. “One such reason is that I have a responsibility to your parents to keep you safe from harm, whether it is from dark wizards or the Ministry of Magic.”

“Oh,” Harry said softly and fell silent for a few moments, appearing to be in deep thought. He looked up again and there was a glint in his eyes as he stared at Dumbledore flatly. “That’s lovely. Now, why are you really doing this?”

Dumbledore didn’t seem to acknowledge the question as his eyes drifted away from Harry, idly staring out the window for a few moments. Finally, he let out a wearied sigh and turned back to Harry, sorrow in his eyes.

“All knowledge comes with a price, Harry, and I do not believe that you are ready to pay this price, no matter how experienced you are,”

He murmured softly, almost regretfully. "There will be a time when I can tell you, but that time is not now."

"That was vague to the point of uselessness," Harry muttered to himself, rolling his eyes, but he shook his head in resignation and dropped the subject. What did he care why the man was helping him, as long as he was helped. "Now, is that it? Can I get back to my breakfast now?"

"There is more to discuss, Harry," Dumbledore said and Harry sighed. However, his nonchalant attitude disappeared as a hard light comes into Dumbledore's eyes and Harry stiffened, suddenly noticing how there seemed to be a faint static charge of power around Dumbledore as the old stared at Harry with cold blue eyes. It was enough to make even Harry nervous, although he still kept his feet on the table.

"You, Harry, have made a bargain with the Winter Fae known as Maeve," Dumbledore said, his tone mild despite his demeanour. "Have you not?"

Harry frowned cautiously but nodded slowly.

"So?" He asked, warily moving his hand into the pocket of his overcoat to grip his wand. "I couldn't have killed the Drakon without her help, you know."

"Be that as it may, I'm afraid I must know the exact details of your bargain with her," Dumbledore said, and it was not a question.

"What?" Harry asked incredulously. "Why the hell do you want to know that? It's my problem, not yours."

"Harry, you do not know what you have done," Dumbledore said and the sternness in his demeanour vanished, replaced with a bone-deep weariness, and Harry blinked and how old the man looked. "Once the Fae are able to get a hold over you, you will find that you may never escape it."

“What the hell are you talking about?” Harry demanded with a scowl on his face. “I know the bargain. It won’t happen like that! Besides, how the hell would you know anything about this anyway?”

“I know, Harry, because...” Dumbledore began and suddenly there was a flash of flames appeared in the office and Harry had a brief flashback to the comet of flames saving Dumbledore’s life at the First Task as the flames died down over the golden bird perch in the corner of the office and a figure emerged from it. It was a bird of red and golden plumage and immortal black eyes and it stared at Harry impassively as comprehension came over his face. He looked back at Dumbledore with an expression of shock on his face as the Headmaster finished his statement. “Because I once made the same mistake.”

“A phoenix,” Harry murmured and turned back to the bird, which had started to preen itself.

‘A summer faery,’ Meciél whispered softly. ‘And a powerful one at that. There are only a few Faeries who have the power to cross over to this realm without being summoned, and very few of those Fae have abilities such as this once has displayed. This faery may be just below the strength of the Winter Lady, Maeve.’

“This is the Fae that was blocking Maeve from looking into this castle,” Harry murmured, eying the phoenix speculatively. He turned back to Dumbledore. “What’s going on?”

Dumbledore pressed his fingers together and leant back into his chair, his eyes glazing over as he retreated into his memories and began to talk.

“I have been indebted to Fawkes for exactly around forty-nine years last August,” He began softly. “In those times, there was a dark wizard who was on the verge to rising to power. He was a very powerful and insane man who fashioned himself as Grindelwald and he had no goal other than to cause terror, no purpose other than to kill.”

“That sounds like a lot of people I’ve met,” Harry muttered and frowned when Meciél wordlessly shushed him. He could feel her paying close attention to this conversation and with a sigh, he bit his lip and listened in as well as Dumbledore continued.

“They were dark times, Harry. It was during the muggle war and there was hatred and suspicion within both worlds. Grindelwald seized upon the chaos that the war brought with it and struck out at a number of key Ministry figures, causing enough internal conflict and dissent to further his goals. Had he been left unchecked, Grindelwald would have risen to have become a Dark Lord akin to the likes of Voldemort and quite possible, could have seized control of the British Ministry of Magic.”

“You went after him,” Harry said, and it wasn’t a question.

Dumbledore nodded slightly, casting a pensieve eye on the phoenix. He clasped his hands together and began talking again, not heeding the portraits that weren’t even pretending to be sleeping now.

“I did,” Dumbledore said quietly. “In my arrogance, I believed that only I had the power to defeat him. I was considered to be a powerful wizard at that time, potentially one of the most powerful, and many were confused when I decided to take the quiet position as Hogwarts Transfiguration Professor. However, I was blinded by my own power and Grindelwald was far too powerful for me alone to defeat. Yet, there was nobody else who could face him. Every Auror who was sent after him was defeated and killed, until I left the school and went forth to battle him. I confronted him and we duelled. His powers were great and his skill, at that time, was far superior to my own. I knew I was going to lose this duel the moment it began, but there was little choice but to continue.”

“This is when you asked Fawkes for help, right?” Harry asked, eying the red-gold plumaged bird, who eyed him back with fearless eyes.

“Actually, it was the other way around,” Dumbledore said and chuckled. “Grindelwald was most shocked when a phoenix appeared out of nowhere and drove him back with her song. Fawkes settled on

my shoulder and her voice entered my head. She offered me the power needed to defeat Grindelwald...for a price, of course. I had no other choice but to accept the terms and with Fawkes' help, I broke Grindelwald's power and defeated him. Since that day, Fawkes has remained with me, ensuring that I fulfil my ends of the bargain."

Harry was silent as Dumbledore turned to him, looking far older and wearied than Harry had ever seen before. The Headmaster's serious blue eyes met Harry's green eyes, and Harry was the first to look away, shifting uncomfortably in his seat as Fawkes soared down from her perch. The phoenix landed on the old man's shoulder in a show of possessiveness and Dumbledore smiled, regaining his benign smile and cheerful demeanour as he scratched the phoenix under the chin.

"So you see, Harry," Dumbledore said lightly. "I do know what I am talking about. I have made my decision and I have accepted the outcome, after all, Fawkes is a very agreeable companion and if were I given the chance to make the choice again, I would do no different. However, the being you bartered with is far nastier and crueller than Fawkes could ever be. I do not want to see you bound into her clutches for the rest of your life."

"What was the bargain you made? What did you give to see this man dead? Harry asked quietly, staring at Fawkes with a curious expression on his face.

The bird seemed to sniff at him and Harry could have sworn he saw a look of disgust and revulsion comes over its face as Dumbledore contemplated his answer.

'It can smell the last vestiges of Winter magic upon you,' Meciell said quietly. 'And Summer definitely does not like Winter.'

"Alas, Harry, that is my secret to bear," Dumbledore said. "Suffice to say, I pay the price of my choices every single day. There are many people who wonder why I have no family, no children. That loss was just a part of the terms I hastily agreed to."

“I won’t become like you,” Harry said confidently, although doubt floated above his mind. “I won’t be bound like you. My bargain was easier, a one-shot deal. I give Maeve what she wants and that’s it.”

Dumbledore stared at him silently, seemingly pondering something, and then sighed.

“Just be careful, Harry,” He murmured as he stroked Fawkes’ head. The phoenix leant into his touch with a soft crooning noise and Dumbledore gave a soft smile, the twinkle appearing back in his eyes.

“Was that all?” Harry asked rudely, suddenly feeling annoyed at Dumbledore and this entire conversation. “Or is there something else that you feel the need to confess to me? I’m not a damned priest, you know. Well, not a priest of God...I wonder if I can be called a priest of the devil. After all, I do have a fallen angel in my head.”

“I believe there is nothing more to discuss at the present moment,” Dumbledore said, his eyes twinkling, but he suddenly looked past Harry and stared at the door intently. “Ah, we finish just in time.”

“What?” Harry asked in confusion.

“Come in,” Dumbledore called out cheerfully and Harry heard the door open. He turned his head and looked around as a tall man with dark skin, heavy eyes and wearing a thick leather coat. A long cylinder postal package was strapped to his back and Harry knew that there was a sword in that as his lips curled, anger flaring in the pit of his stomach.

He jumped to his feet, his eyes narrowed with hatred as he backed away from both Dumbledore and the newcomer as he clutched his wand, feeling the reassuring touch of wood.

“Knight,” Harry hissed coldly, his green eyes glinting.

“Demon,” The Russian Knight, Sanya, replied in a thick accent, just as coldly.

“You two have met?” Dumbledore asked in slight surprise. There was still a smile on his face but the look in his eye told Harry that he was aware of the sudden tension that had filled the room.

“Yeah, in the workplace,” Harry remarked and cocked his head towards Dumbledore, his next words a loud whisper. “He stabbed me.”

“I was merely doing my duty as a servant against evil,” Sanya said calmly, although there was a tension around his eyes, as if he expected Harry to go psychotic at any second. He held himself as if he was ready for such a thing, and Harry visible calmed himself down, closing his eyes and taking a deep breath. When he opened them again, his eyes were cold but they were calm.

‘Very good, beloved.’

“Why are you here?” Harry asked softly without emotion.

“I’m here on behalf of Michael to check up on his daughters,” Sanya said and gave a slight frown, the next words coming out with a grudging tone. “He sends his uttermost thanks...as do I.”

Harry allowed an arrogant and superior smile to come over his face as he mockingly bowed his head in Sanya’s direction.

“Well, I know that you Knights have a terrible record against Nicodemus and his lot in general, so I thought I’d lend my...superior skills,” He finished with a satisfied smile and watched Sanya twitch.

“Record?” Dumbledore asked carefully, and Harry was all too happy to answer him.

“Hundreds of Knights have died trying to kill the bastard,” Harry said and stared at Sanya with a cold smile on his face. “Hundreds more will probably die in the future.”

“You don’t sound upset,” Dumbledore noted and something like disappointment had crept into his voice.

“Hey, I hate the Knights,” Harry said, almost defensively, before he frowned. “Well, it’s mostly a professional hatred than personal hatred, although the bastard here falls into the latter.”

“Why?” Sanya asked, sounding genuinely curious, and Harry stared.

“You stabbed me!” He growled.

“Yeah, I did,” Sanya said with whimsical smile and Harry growled in annoyance, gesturing to the top of the stairway with an impatient flick of his hand.

“Go away,” Harry demanded in annoyance. “Go find Molly and the brat or whatever. Just get out of my sight before urge to kill you overtakes me and I have to break my promise to the old guy here.”

Sanya lifted his eyebrows but he complied and turned to Dumbledore.

“I’ll leave you two alone for now, Headmaster,” He said slowly and with one last glance at Harry, left the room. Harry could hear him walking down the stairs and didn’t relax until the sounds of footsteps faded away.

Harry looked at Dumbledore and opened his mouth, an annoyed and irritated expression on his face. But no words seemed to come to him and he closed it with an audible snap and made a noise of disgust before he stormed out of Dumbledore’s office with a disgruntled frown.

‘The stakes have been raised,’ Meciell said softly. ‘Let us hope he is not here for you.’

“Great,” Harry muttered to himself as he stalked back to the Gryffindor tower, suddenly feeling the urge to handle his sword. “Just fucking great. A Knight, a fucking Knight of the Cross. Could it get any worse?”

‘Oh, I wish you hadn’t said that, beloved.’

“There’s a what?” Harry exclaimed in shock, pumpkin juice spluttering out of his mouth and over his dinner plate. He turned to stare at McGonagall with shock on his face, but the Transfiguration Professor was having none of it.

“A ball, Mr Potter,” She said crisply, glaring at him with no-nonsense eyes.

“What type?” Harry asked quickly. “Football? Baseball? Basketball?”

“A dance ball,” snapped McGonagall, her annoyance of Harry reflected on her prim face. “Now, Champions are required to lead the first dance with their partner, so you must...”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa,” Harry cut in quickly, raising his hands in protest and shaking his head furiously. “No and no. I don’t do dances and I don’t do dates.”

“An activity such as this is a required perquisite within the tournament rules,” McGonagall said, her lips pursed together and her nostrils flared. “So, Mr Potter, I suggest that you find a girl that you have not driven off with your bad attitude and that you learn how to dance.”

Harry blinked and opened his mouth to respond, but McGonagall had already whirled around and left for the Head table before Harry could fire off a witty response. He closed his mouth and an audible snap and sighed.

“Bitch,” He muttered to himself.

“Well, this should be interesting,” Meciél mused. Harry sighed and glanced to his left, where Meciél’s illusion sat beside him clothed in pristine silver robes.

“You seem to be showing yourself to me more than usual,” He muttered quietly. “It gets distracting, you know.”

Meciel, however, ignored him and was staring at the food with something like interest.

“When you’re done throwing your tantrum, try some of that apple pie. I haven’t had a host try that for several decades, at least.”

“Oh, shut up,” Harry muttered and he poked at his food with his fork meat with vicious jabbing movements. “You’re in this as much as I am.”

“What did you say?” Somebody said and Harry blinked, focusing his eyes in front of him to where Ron was staring. The red-haired boy wore an expression of curiously tinged with nervousness, the latter becoming more pronounced when Harry glared at him.

“What do you want?” Harry asked rudely, a scowl on his face. Next to him, Amanda looked over from her conversation with Hermione, but turned back a second later.

Unlike most of the students from Hogwarts, Amanda hadn’t changed her behaviour around him in light of the First Task. Perhaps it was because she knew of his true nature and knew what he was really capable of, or perhaps it was because he saved both her life and her family’s lives. Either way, Harry was disappointed that she had continued to stick around him, although he had to admit that he would take Amanda over Hermione on any day.

“I heard McGonagall telling you about the dance,” Ron said and shifted in his seat uncomfortably. “What’s the problem, really?”

“I have to find a date,” Harry spat out in annoyance. “And dance.”

“You could ask any girl here to the dance and they’ll say yes,” Neville offered up timidly and blushed when Harry pinned him with an annoyed glare.

“He’s right, you know,” Ron agreed through a mouthful of food. He seemed to gain confidence as he swallowed and gestured down the

table. "Why don't you try Katie Bell or Lavender Brown? They're cute enough and they'd say yes if you asked them."

"They are fairly attractive," Meciél said as Harry turned his eyes down the table to where both an athletic blonde was furiously chatting to her friends and another blonde with a vapid expression on her face was whispering mysteriously to a girl of Indian descent. "For a pair of mortals, anyway."

"You're such an existence-ist," Harry muttered to Meciél. Meciél's face flashed with amusement as she cocked her head at him. Harry rolled his eyes. "You know, like a racist except it's about mortality."

"You really should stop verbally speaking to me," Meciél said in amusement. She leaned back, gesturing with a pale hand to the student sitting on the other side of her, who was giving Harry strange looks. Harry narrowed his eyes and the third-year boy gulped and looked away.

"Oh, is that all you think a date should have?" Somebody said loudly. Harry sighed in irritation as Hermione jumped into an argument with Ron. "For your information, Ronald, there are more important things than looks."

"You know, I'll agree with fuzz-ball over there," Harry said and Hermione twitched, glaring at Harry in anger. Harry brushed off and continued. "For instance, you could have the breasts of a supermodel but still be as annoying as a Faerie on a sugar high."

"You have to admit," Meciél said with a whimsical smile on her face. "It was very funny."

"You didn't have to clean it up," Harry muttered under his breath and then focussed his attention on Hermione as Meciél gave a quiet bubbling laugh.

"How dare you-" Hermione started, bristling with righteous indignation, but Ron hastily broke in, cutting over his friend's voice.

“Who will you go with then?” He asked, while Hermione muttered something rude under her breath. She turned back to Amanda, who was shaking her head in resignation over Harry’s antics.

“Don’t know, don’t care,” Harry muttered with an air of finality. Ron received the message and the two boys both turned back to their dinner.

“Just ask somebody, beloved,” Meciél said with an exasperated sigh, folding her hands on her lap and putting on an expression that a mother might show her troublemaking child.

“I don’t want to,” Harry growled at the illusion and continued his dinner while Meciél rolled her eyes, a habit she had recently picked up from Harry.

“You are acting like such a child,” Meciél said crossly, her hair glinting underneath the light of the candles. “It’s just a dance.”

“Don’t make me hit you,” Harry threatened softly and he had to glare at the boy on the other side of Meciél, who quickly decided to finish his dinner and leave the table. Harry’s lips twitched into a smile and he felt Meciél’s amusement rush through his brain.

“I have no corporeal form, beloved,” The Fallen said patiently and gestured to herself. “This is just an illusion only you can see, hear and perceive. I would be very amused to see you try to attempt such a feat, although it would not put to rest the many doubts your classmates are having about your sanity.”

“And whose fault is that?” Harry mumbled softly, throwing a half-hearted glare towards Meciél. “If somebody hadn’t appeared during Transfiguration and made those very funny comments at McGonagall, I wouldn’t have laughed.”

“I merely said what you were thinking,” Meciél said and lazily closed her eyes as she stretched her arms. Within his mind, Harry could feel Meciél’s presence give the mental equivalent of her actions and shook his head with a sigh.

“If you keep annoying me, I’ll do something you won’t like,” Harry threatened as a sudden thought occurred to him and he hid it from Meciél, his lips curved in an amused smile. The Fallen blinked at him and suddenly looked suspicious as she felt him shield his thoughts and a grin played on her lips.

“You mean apart from opening your mouth?” Meciél retorted in amusement and Harry can’t help but snicker with her as the two of them laughed. Harry ignored the strange looks he was receiving and shook his head ruefully.

“And you wonder where I get it from,” He muttered, placing his fork down on his plate. “Okay then, you asked for it.”

He turned his attention to his left, where Amanda was talking quietly to a fourth-year boy from Ravenclaw that Harry had seen in the few classes he attended. Amanda had a flush of colour in her cheeks and the boy seemed to be stammering and blushing. There was very little doubt on what they were talking about and Harry frowned.

“Hey,” He called out loudly and the boy blinked and looked up, confusion on his face. “Yeah, you. Who are you?”

The boy hesitated as he recognised just who he was talking to and he unconsciously flinched, taking a step backwards as he licked his lips.

“T-T-Terry Boot,” He answered in a nervous stammer.

“Well, T-T-Terry,” Harry mocked coldly. “Just what are you doing?”

“I-I’m asking out Amanda...to the...to the ball,” Terry stuttered and Amanda turned around, confusion and annoyance in her soft blue eyes.

“Oh,” Harry frowned. He seemed to come to some kind of internal decision and nodded resolutely. “In that case, piss off.”

“Excuse me?” Terry asked slowly.

“She’s going with me,” Harry declared curtly. “Now, run away.”

Harry heard Meciél take in a deep breath of surprise and he grinned, not needing to turn around to know what was on the Fallen’s face.

Amanda blinked, looking shocked and surprised. Terry opened his mouth, anger on his face, but it died down as he stared into Harry’s cold, hard eyes, seeing something he really didn’t want to see. He managed a single stammer and a quick glance towards Amanda before he fled the table under Harry’s condescending smile.

“I am?” Amanda asked testily, her eyes narrowed, and she flicked her blonde ponytail over her shoulder with a jerky irritated movement. “Since when?”

“Since,” Harry said and frowned, counting silently on his fingers. “Seven seconds ago.”

Amanda seemed to have been stunned into silence, her cheeks suffusing with red from both embarrassment and anger as she stared at Harry with emotion-filled blue eyes. The silence didn’t last long as Hermione broke in from the other side of the table.

“You can’t do that!” She declared in outrage, a shocked expression on her face.

“I’m beginning to think you were right about her,” Harry muttered under his breath to Meciél and then raised his voice as he continued. “Er...yes I can. In fact, I just did.”

Hermione scowled at him furiously and rounded on Amanda, anger blazing in her eyes.

“Are you going to let him do this?” She demanded.

Amanda frowned and hesitated as Harry eyed her, avoiding his gaze and looking down at her hands she fiddled with them on her lap.

“What if I want to go with somebody else?” She asked quietly and looked up.

“Then you better bring that person to me so I can check them out,” Harry said after a moment’s hesitation.

“Who do you think you are?” Hermione spat out angrily. “You can’t control her! She’s not your slave, you know. You can’t dictate who she can go to the ball with! You’re not her father!”

“No, I’m her personal knight,” Harry spat out sarcastically and Amanda stiffened, sending him a meaningful glance as her eyes widened with realisation.

“Oh,” she said in a small voice, then firmed her face and nodded resolutely. “Fine, I’ll go with you.”

“Amanda!” Hermione gasped in a tone of shock and betrayal. She whirled on her friend with a befuddled and betrayed expression on her face. “You can’t be serious! He treats you like garbage! Why would you want to go with him?”

Amanda gave a half-shrug and Harry gave a sly smile, looking away and turning back to his breakfast. He knew that Amanda couldn’t reveal why she thought she had to go with him and he spared a glance to his left, where Meciél sat with a displeased expression on her face.

“Told you,” He muttered under his breath and gave her a mischievous grin. Meciél merely let out a huff and her illusion suddenly disappeared, revealing an empty bench next to Harry. Harry gave a small victorious chuckle but was shaken out of his win over Meciél by Hermione’s loud, shrill and very annoying voice.

“I won’t let you do this!” The bushy-haired girl snapped, crossing her arms over her chest. “You’re only rewarding his bad behaviour! He’s a cruel, petty person who treats everybody like they’re rubbish!”

“He is not!” Amanda suddenly snapped heatedly. Harry, Hermione, and the silent spectators of Ron and Neville blinked in surprise at the vehemence in the blonde girl’s tone, Hermione looking particularly shocked as her well-mannered friend rounded in on her.

“You don’t know anything about him!” Amanda snapped heatedly, her blue eyes sparkling with emotion. “You don’t know what he’s really like, or what’s he’s done for me and my family, or how bad he could really be, so just shut up!”

Hermione blinked and appeared to be too stunned to speak. Harry blinked as well and a hesitant frown came over his face.

‘On second thoughts, maybe this is a win for you,’ He thought and felt Meciél throb with amusement.

“You do know that this isn’t a date or anything,” He said slowly.

“I know,” Amanda snapped at him, rolling her eyes sarcastically.

“Don’t eyeball me,” Harry snapped back between gritted teeth and Amanda flushed under his annoyed gaze, her rebellious attitude fading. She fell silent and went back to poking her food with her fork.

Harry gave a satisfied nod and glanced up at the Head Table. Dumbledore was chatting quietly with Snape but when he saw Harry watching, his blue eyes twinkled and he gave a small nod. Harry made a face and his eyes sought out the figure he was looking for. Sanya was quietly sitting over his dinner at the end of the table.

The Knight must have had a sixth sense or something because his eyes shot up and met Harry’s squarely. Harry stared back defiantly and with a small grin, placed an arm around Amanda. The girl jumped at the contact and looked him in surprise but Harry ignored her, enjoying Sanya’s narrowing eyes.

“Smile for the Knight, Amanda,” he murmured as he kept his gaze at Sanya, who looked disgruntled and annoyed and broke eye contact. “Smile for the Knight.”

Later that night, Harry walked through the darkened corridors of Hogwarts with Amanda trailing by his side, an annoyed expression on his face. He had decided to attend the older sister's class because he had heard she was going to summon a demon for them, and he would admit that he was quite curious to see what would happen. However, Amanda had insisted on coming with him and had caught up to him a few minutes after he had walked off on her, and she just wouldn't shut up.

"Why did you really ask me to the dance?" Amanda pressed and Harry sighed, rolling his eyes for the tenth time that minute.

"What did I say two minutes ago?" Harry asked with a scowl and he turned a corner, making sure not to hit one of the suits of armour gleaming in the darkened hallway.

"Um...go away right now or I'll grab my wand, shove it so far down your throat and curse you so hard that your spleen will suddenly have the urge to see what the fuss is about sunlight?" Amanda recited with a look of concentration on her face. Harry gave a low growl deep in his throat and Amanda trailed off, a small smile on her face.

"You really are an idiot," Harry muttered. "Amanda, I am using you, remember?"

"Sure you are, Harry," Amanda said in a patronising tone. "You're using me to annoy the Fallen."

"Meciel," Harry corrected absently and Amanda frowned.

"You're using me to annoy Meciel," She corrected and a sly smile tugged at her lips. "Or you're going with me to make sure Nicodemus doesn't kill me so you can claim a debt with daddy. Right, like I really believe that."

"Why do I get the strange feeling that you don't believe me?" Harry said in mock-thought and then rolled his eyes, pinning her with an annoyed stare. "Okay, why do you think I asked you?"

“I think you like me,” Amanda said simply and gave a brilliant smile as she awaited Harry’s response.

Harry stared at her for an entire second before he burst out in laughter, his mocking voice echoing off the darkened and empty hallway. He kept laughing as he shook his head in amusement and Amanda’s smile faded just a little as his laughter died down into a few quiet chuckles.

“Are you serious?” Harry asked her incredulously, before he held up a hand. “No, please, wait. Don’t answer that. I might start laughing again.”

“Laugh all you want,” Amanda said, turning away from his gaze and smoothing the front of her crimson Salem robes. “I think that you’re nowhere near as bad as you try to make yourself appear and that you like me, even if it’s just a little bit.”

“You, my little vapid-blond, are having some serious delusions,” Harry said with a snort but Amanda merely smiled and he sighed. “You know, you’re not as smart as you make yourself out to be.”

“Yet you asked her to the ball,” Came a smooth and melodious voice on his right. Harry gave a startled flinch, jerking to his left and instinctively reaching into his clothes for his wand.

Amanda frowned and looked past Harry’s shoulder, seeing nothing out of the ordinary, but Harry straightened himself out and fixed the air with a piercing flare, an annoyed scowl on his face.

“What have I said about doing that?” He demanded, narrowing his eyes at the apparition in front of him. Meciell’s illusion gave a tiny shrug, a small smile on her radiant face, and broke Harry’s gaze.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about, beloved,” she said smoothly.

Harry gave a grunt, clearly indicating that he didn't believe her, and started walking again. Amanda was frowning in confusion but suddenly smoothed over her face into what she thought was a neutral expression, although displeasure and wariness tugged at her eyes.

"It's her, isn't it?" She asked flatly.

"Tell her that I find her presence unwelcome, annoying and irritating," Meciél said and smiled coldly as she stared at the blonde-haired girl. "Tell her that the object of her affections will never return them back to her. Tell her that when she is old and fat, she will have nothing to look back on with pride and joy. Tell her that her father will most likely die a horrible and painful death in the line of duty defending those who have forsaken her precious God. Tell her..."

"Meciél, could you just shut it?" Harry asked in annoyance and Meciél stopped speaking, a smug expression on her face.

"What did she say?" Amanda asked curiously, in despite of herself.

"Something along the lines of..." Harry frowned, biting his lip. "She doesn't like you, she hopes that you have an unhappy life and she hopes you never find love. She says a few bad things about your father as well."

"Oh really?" Amanda asked with an angry glint in her eyes. "Well, you tell her that I think she's a nasty..."

"I am not getting in the middle of a bitch fight so you can both just stop it right now," Harry interrupted quickly, holding up his hands between Amanda and the illusion as if he were going to stop them from tearing at each other. "Unless, of course, there's mud, bikinis, wrestling and a rubber glove involved."

"A rubber glove?" Amanda asked with a curious frown and was met with Harry's dark smile.

“Do you really want to know?” He asked with a suggestive tilt of his eyebrows and Amanda blushed, ducking her head and quickening her step. “Yeah, I didn’t think so.”

When Harry and Amanda walked into Molly’s classroom, they could both tell that they were running a bit late. The demon thrashing behind a sparkling blue magical barrier with pincer-like claws and a bird-like beak was a bit of a giveaway. The fifty or so Hogwarts students who had decided to attend this class had backed away from the summoning circle, some clutching to each other as they all stared at the entrapped demon with nothing short of terror.

Molly was the only person in a ten metre radius of the demon, standing in the centre of the room with her a slender staff in her hand. Her eyes were fluttering and her lips were silently moving as she poured her magic into the circle, keeping it powered up as the demon tried with all its might to tear it down, a loud screeching roar emerging from its beak.

Amanda let out a loud gasp of shock and revulsion when she saw the demon while Harry merely lifted an eyebrow, staring at the demon with a faint sense of recognition. Amanda flinched as the demon screeched in anger again and slammed back and forth against the barrier, but Harry rolled his eyes and stepped forward.

“And the Oscar for Best Asexual Demon goes to...” He calls out loudly, catching the entire room’s attention. “To....to.... Chaunzaggoroth, for its marvellous performance in Hogwarts: When Demons go Mad! Let’s all give it a round of applause!”

The class was staring at Harry as if was insane but the demon had stopped and was staring at him with its slanted eyes. To the astonishment to class, it used a pincer-like hand to delicately remove a pair of glasses from behind one of its large scale and placed it on its beak.

“Must you mock me?” It asked in a cultivated oxford accent, surprising the class once more and they alternated between staring at

Harry and the demon. Molly sighed with something like relief and lowered her staff, staring at the demon grimly.

Harry frowned, looking as if he were thinking hard. After a few moments, he gave a short nod, a smug smile on his face.

“I’ve thought about it and all I get is....yes,” He said and finished with a careless shrug of his shoulders.

“Very well,” Chaunzaggroth said and turned to Molly, eying her from behind his cultivated glasses. “Why have you summoned me here, True-Wizard? What do you want to know and what are you willing to pay me for this knowledge?”

The class turned their attention back to Molly, although a few were still shooting Harry strange and disbelieving looks, but the young Denarian shrugged them off, well used to this kind of attention by now. Molly, however, ignored the demon and turned to the class, her voice young but crisp.

“Now, as you can see, the demon fought against the barrier with all of its strength, even though it really didn’t want to get out,” Molly lectured to an attentive class and Harry had to admit that she had a good teaching voice. “All demons have an obligation to escape and kill the Wizard that summoned them, although most of them never get the chance. Now, who here has done the reading and can tell me why the demon looks as it does?”

Hermione’s hand shot up into the air and Harry frowned, before placing a pleading expression on his face and furiously waving his hand in the air.

“Oh please, Professor,” he said in a nasal voice dripping with scorn and mockery. “Pick me, Pick me, I’m a little teacher’s pet and I absolutely must answer you.”

Hermione flushed and lowered her hand, glaring at Harry with anger in her eyes. Molly sighed in resignation and seeing no other hands in the air, pointed to Harry. Harry cleared his throat, stopped and

frowned. He cleared his throat again and scratched his head with a befuddled expression on his face.

Hermione gave a smug half-smile and moved to put her hand back up again. But her smile faded as Harry's stupid expression faded away and he answered the question in a loud and clear voice.

"Demons don't exist in this world," He began. "They can only be called here through mortal magic, and in order to interact with humans they need to create a physical shell to house their consciousness. As demons, this physical shell works well when it comes with sharp claws, big teeth and slimy tentacles, hence, why they all look butt-ugly."

"Ugly to a mortal perspective, perhaps," Chaunzaggoroth interrupted, an expression that Harry could only interpret as annoyance on its face. It opens its beak again to speak but Molly waved her staff and the demon halted. For a second, Harry could see only pure rage on its face as it let out a screech of anger before disappearing in a small burst of flames and a puff of smoke.

The class seemed to breathe a collective sigh of relief as the demon disappeared, although a few of them took a step backwards as the barrier around the summoning circle disappeared.

"Very good, Mr Potter," Molly praised through gritted teeth.

"Oh please, I thought we had at least reached first names, Molly," Harry said charmingly, flashing a winning smile at the young Professor, who eyed him icily.

"Ten points from Gryffindor," She snapped out and Harry stared at her blankly, showing his total lack of concern, while Hermione twitched.

Molly turned back to class and raised her voice as she gestured them all to come in closer.

“Okay everybody, now that we’ve seen an example of a demon...Mr Potter, where are you going?” She asked during mid-sentence. As soon as the demon had disappeared, Harry had made his way for the door but he turned back when Molly addressed him, a look of disdain on his face.

“I go to the zoo to see the really cool animals, not listen to the tour guide,” He said, and bowed at Molly mockingly before he left.

The last classes finished in the first week of December, leaving an entire castle full of loud annoying students. Because of the Yule Ball, the only students to go home for the holidays were those in Third Year and below who hadn't been invited to the ball. The Christmas holidays loomed up, bringing with it a festive cheer that even affected Harry. Harry, with Meciél's grudging approval, had eased up on his Transfiguration practise and his other studies and spent much of his time relaxing or just taking it easy. When Christmas Eve came around, Harry found himself sitting in the Gryffindor common room with his feet up, almost asleep by the blazing fire as he rubbed his stomach contentedly.

There was a soft murmur of chatter throughout the common room, but Harry was able to block it out. Most of the Gryffindor's seemed to have his idea and were generally taking it easy. However, there was one fourth-year bushy haired girl that, in Harry's opinion, seemed to have her wand up her arse about her schoolwork. Even now, she was sitting nearby with a heavy tome on her lap, muttering to herself as she traced out a sentence with her finger. After five seconds of hearing Hermione's voice, Harry was beginning to feel annoyed. After five minutes, he had had enough.

"Hermione?" Harry broke in Hermione's musings. She blinked and looked up, frowning as she identified the speaker. "Could you do me a favour?"

"What is it?" Hermione asked cautiously.

"Could you close that book and sit there silently?" Harry asked in a semi-polite tone, his usual biting tongue seeming to have swallowed along with roast pork he had had for dinner.

"No," Hermione exclaimed and looked at Harry with disgust and annoyance. She glared at him and ducked her head back into the massive tome on her lap. Almost immediately, she was muttering again, frowning in concentration as she ran her finger over another line.

“Hermione?” Harry asked sweetly. Hermione gave an impatient sigh and broke away from her book, looking particularly bothered as she glared at him.

“What?” She snapped. Harry’s smile disappeared and he stared at her coldly with glinting emerald eyes.

“Shut the fuck up,” He said softly, but dangerously. Hermione gaped at him, flinching at his language, while Harry settled back down in his seat and stared at the fire again.

“Excuse me?” Hermione said in disbelief, her eyes wide.

“Your voice is grating on my brain like a lawnmower grates up human flesh,” Harry says slowly. “So, shut the fuck up.”

Hermione’s nostrils flared and she snapped her book shut, looking angry and determined. She stood up, shrugging off Ron and walked forward to before Harry.

“Can I help you?” Harry asked lazily and gave Hermione a cocky smile through half-lidded eyes.

“No, you can’t help me,” Hermione said loudly, breathing deeply as she stared at him resolutely. “Do you know what your problem is, Harry Potter?”

“I have lice,” Harry replied. “It doesn’t matter what I do, the little bastards keeping coming back. I’m thinking of nuking my hair, just to get rid of them once and for all, but I’m a little worried. I don’t want a Chernobyl situation running down my ears.”

“There,” Hermione spat out loudly and the common room quietened, students looking up to watch the spectacle. “That’s it right there. You always have an answer for everything, some stupid smart-aleck line to say.”

“What can I say?” Harry said lazily and shrugged, feeling quite amused. “Nobody’s perfect, except me. Don’t worry; you’ll eventually have an answer for everything as well. Trust me; the meaning of life will be a real kick in the balls for you. You won’t be expecting it.”

“There you go again,” Hermione cried out and stamped her foot on the ground. “You just don’t get it, Potter, do you? You’re not funny! Nobody thinks you’re a rebel, or that you’re cool. You’re just a pathetic bully who laughs at his own bad jokes!”

“You really think that?” Harry asked softly and Hermione nodded.

‘I laugh at your jokes, beloved,’ Meciél said. ‘That must count for something.’

“Ah, you’re wrong,” Harry said and dismissed Hermione with a wave of his hand. “My invisible friend just told me that she laughs at my jokes. That makes two, at least.”

“You just don’t get it, do you?” Hermione said and gave a short bark of laughter. “Everybody around here is too afraid of you to tell you what they really think of you, but I’m not. You, Harry Potter, are nothing more than a big bully who thinks it’s funny to belittle other people. You have no respect for anything or anyone. You treat everybody like garbage, even the people who are nice to you, and you strut around like you own the place. If you keep this up, Harry, then you’ll never have any friends and your life will lonely and miserable!”

Harry cocked an eyebrow as Hermione stopped to take a breath, an amused smile on his face.

“Care to tell me something I don’t know?” He asked in amusement.

“Oh, I will,” Hermione said, breathing deeply as she jabbed a finger in his direction. “Everybody else may fear you or hate you, but I don’t because I know why you act this way. I bet you had a horrible childhood. Maybe you were bullied, or maybe you were abused, or maybe everybody just ignored you, and now you always have to be

the centre of attention. The others might see a big bad rebel but all I see is a tiny little boy crying out for attention he's always wanted."

Harry's face had grown darker as Hermione had continued and by the end, he looked positively murderous. His eyes were glinting coldly and Hermione flinched as she stared into them. For a second it almost looked like they were on fire and something ancient and powerful flashed back at her, but then they cleared up. Hermione blinked in surprise as Harry changed from murderous to contemplative in an instant.

"My God," Harry said softly and stood up, staring at Hermione with sad eyes. "You're right. You're totally right. Can you...Can you excuse me while I...go find religion, give up drinking, start smoking so I can give it up and renounce my cruel and evil ways and behaviours?"

Hermione shook her head in disgust while a few of the watching students, including Ron, smiled in amusement.

"What gives you the right to be such an arrogant...bastard?" She snapped after finding a suitable word. "What makes you think that you're better than any of us?"

"Maybe because..." Harry started and gestured to himself with his hands. "Maybe because I defeated the Dark Lord Voldemort as a baby? Is that good enough for you? Remember the muggleborn hating git with the glowing eyes and the green light of doom?"

"That was thirteen years ago!" Hermione scoffed. "And you were only a baby!"

"Yeah," agreed Harry, a superior smile on his face. "And if I hadn't, you wouldn't be here."

Hermione frowned and Harry sighed, rolling his eyes.

“Let me elaborate it for you so you can understand me,” Harry said slowly. “Voldemort win, muggleborn no do magic because muggleborn be dead.”

“I know that!” Hermione snapped, but Harry had snapped his fingers as a thought struck him.

“You know, in a way, you owe me,” He said slyly.

“What?” Hermione snapped, her eyes looking as if they would bulge from their sockets. “I do not!”

“If it weren’t for me, you wouldn’t be able to do magic anymore,” Harry concluded.

Hermione seemed to have been struck speechless as she gaped at him, her eyes wide with shock. Her fingers were twitching as if she wanted to grab her wand and hex him at that very moment, but a flash of Harry’s murderous eyes was enough to make her stay her hand.

Harry gave her an arrogant grin as he yawned, stretching his arms with a lazy expression on his face.

“Don’t worry about shutting up,” He said, still grinning. “I see you’re incapable of keeping your mouth shut. I’ll just go to my bed and get an early start. After all, it’s Christmas tomorrow and I’m sure you need to prepare my present. You know, because you owe me and all.”

Harry strode across the room and walked up the stairs to the dormitory, leaving behind a flabbergasted Hermione, who was wondering where she had gone wrong, and many smiling or annoyed students. One of the former was Ron, who stared after Harry with a rueful shake of his head.

“You got to admit Hermione,” He remarked. “He knows how to make a good exit.”

Christmas morning at Hogwarts was a time of excitement and happiness, enthusiasm and joy. Students would jump out of their blankets and race to the pile of presents stacked neatly at the foot of their bed, tearing off wrapping paper with trembling hands and beaming smiles. This occurred all throughout the castle, from the highest dorms in the Ravenclaw Tower to the lowest beds of the Slytherin dungeons, except for the Fourth Year Dormitory in the Gryffindor tower. When Ronald Weasley, Neville Longbottom and two other nobodies Harry had never met before had raised their voices with excitement early in the morning, they had been met with the business end of Harry's wand and had been told in a polite tone to kindly get the fuck out. A minute later and the room was empty of presents and annoying, chattering boys, and Harry had rolled over and promptly gone back to sleep, a slight smile on his face.

However, even in sleep, Harry was not unaware of his surroundings. Although his conscious mind was resting, Meciél, with her vast control over his brain and nervous system, automatically monitored his dulled senses and several hours after her had kicked the boys out, she alerted him that somebody was trying to sneak up on him. He opened his eyes and was met with a female face framed with mussed blonde hair hovering above his own.

"What are you doing?" He asked loudly and Amanda shrieked in surprise, taking a reflexive step backwards and clasping a hand to her heart. The other hand remained behind her back.

"Don't do that!" She hissed at him, taking in deep breaths as her heart raced from the surprise.

Harry ignored her as he yawned, sitting up in the bed and rubbing the back of his neck.

"I know I have..." Harry begun but yawned again, rubbing his bleary eyes. "I know I have a great body and all, but really. If you wanted to see it then all you had to do was ask."

Amanda blushed and moved forward, lightly whacking him on the shoulder and rolling her eyes. Harry blinked and stared at his shoulder, and then her hand, with a blank expression on his face.

“What was that?” He asked slowly.

Amanda hesitated, biting her lip in worry and wondering if she had overstepped the tenuous bounds between the pair.

“A friendly pat on the shoulder?” She half asked-half answered with hesitation.

Harry stared at her with the beginnings of irritation and Amanda shifted on her feet, the signs of a faint blush of embarrassment starting to present itself. She cleared her throat and revealed the hand from behind her back. In it was a red and green wrapped Christmas gift.

“It’s for you,” She clarified Harry, who was staring at the gift in confusion.

“What?” Harry frowned.

“It’s for you,” Amanda repeated quickly and the blush rose back in her cheeks. Harry continued to stare at the gift oddly, not accepting it from her outstretched hand.

“I don’t want it,” He said frankly.

“Well, it’s yours,” Amanda said a little testily and thumped it down on the bed. “Throw it out if you want.”

Harry hesitated and then reached for it. He picked it up, and with his clumsy movements it was clear he hadn’t developed the nimble paper-tearing skills of his peers. When the present was finally unwrapped, Amanda wrung her hands together as he pulled out a large block of chocolate and a bottle of butterbeer. Harry looked at the presents and then turned his gaze back to Amanda with a blank face.

“I know you haven’t been to Hogsmeade yet, so I thought...well, you seemed to like the stuff that they gave you in the hospital wing...and I...” Amanda rattled off. She closed eyes, took a deep breath, and then opened them again. She looked at him square in the eye and finished her sentence in an even tone. “I hope you like it.”

“I hope you’re not expecting anything,” Harry finally said, breaking the silence and staring at the chocolate bar and butterbeer with an odd expression. He placed it on his bedside table and turned back to Amanda. “Meciel and I don’t celebrate Christmas so I didn’t get anybody gifts....not that I would have bothered even if I did.”

“You don’t have Christmas?” Amanda asked in a scandalised tone, looking shocked, “Why not?”

“Well, for one, it’s a celebration of the birth of Christ,” Harry said and gestured vaguely with his hands. “You know, consorting with the enemy and all that crap.”

“Ah,” Amanda murmured in understanding.

“And secondly,” Harry continued. “Meciel only exists in my mind, my consciousness. She can’t exactly go to the nearest shopping centre and buy me a gift, and vice versa.”

“Oh, that’s sad,” Amanda murmured, looking at Harry with a sympathetic expression on her face. “Well, I hope you like your present. I wasn’t really expecting anything anyway.”

Harry ignored her pity and turned back to his present, a baffled expression on his face.

“Well, it’s your money,” He said and shrugged. “You know, I was just thinking that maybe, just maybe, you’re not really an annoyingly goody-goody teenage brat with an extremely irritating tendency to bug me.”

“Really?” Amanda asked, a beaming smile washing over her face.

“Yeah,” Harry nodded with an earnest expression. “Now you’re just an annoyingly goody-goody teenage brat with an extremely irritating tendency to bug me.”

Amanda mulled it over for a few seconds and frowned.

“Hang on, you just said the exact same thing,” She said in confusion.

“I did?” Harry asked with a frown and Amanda nodded. “Oh well, I guess I really haven’t changed my opinion of you after all.”

Amanda blinked and then let out a cheerful laugh. Harry blinked in surprise as she continued to laugh and stared at her strangely.

“C’mon Harry,” Amanda said with an amused tone, her laughter fading. She smiled at Harry with something like fondness. “Let’s go get breakfast while it’s still there.”

A few minutes later, Harry and Amanda were walking towards the Great Hall. Amanda was still smiling although she seemed to be a little fidgety by his side, while Harry was staring out of the windows. He guessed that it was probably around quarter-past-ten in the morning, which meant that he only had fifteen minutes before the house elves cleared the tables. As the two Gryffindors turned a corner they came face to face with Draco Malfoy. The platinum-blond haired boy looked content, but his face was quickly painted over into a sneer as he regarded Harry and Amanda haughtily. Behind him were two large students, their robes covered in scraps of food, and Amanda looked repulsed by their appearances as one of them burped loudly.

“Well, well, well, if it isn’t Potty and the Mudblood.” Malfoy drawled.

“Oh shut up, Malfoy,” Amanda snapped in a sharp tone that Harry hadn’t heard from her before.

However, he was too busy chuckling in amusement to ponder her reaction and Amanda, Malfoy and the two goons turned to stare at

the laughing boy. Malfoy eyed him with a mixture disgust and confusion, his disgruntlement growing larger and larger.

“What’s so funny, scar-head?” He spat out, much to the amusement of Harry, who continued chuckling.

Malfoy bristled, his anger frowning with every moment, but Harry eventually stopped and shook his head in amusement.

“Potty?” He asked in amusement, quoting the insults with his fingers. “Scar head? Wow, Malfoy, you’re really quick with your tongue. We better keep you away from preschoolers, you just might make some of them cry.”

Malfoy flushed and his face was taut with a burning anger as the tables were quickly turned against him.

“You better watch it Potter. You’re outnumbered here,” Malfoy spat out threateningly and gestured to the thugs beside him.

Harry blinked.

“Are you serious?” He asked incredulously.

Malfoy only smirked while the large boys leered maliciously at Harry, cracking their beefy knuckles in a threatening manner.

“Why don’t you leave, Potter,” Malfoy said, smirking. His eyes flickered over towards Amanda, who seemed to have taken a backseat in this conversation and his smirk grew wider. “And take this useless dirty-blooded piece of American trash with you.”

Amanda unconsciously flinched at the verbal attack, but Harry only nodded as if Malfoy had just confirmed something for him. He took a few steps forward, moving into Malfoy’s comfort zone in a single instant. Malfoy only had time to shy away in surprise before Harry whipped out his arm and gave Malfoy a vicious backhanded slap. Malfoy gave a cry of pain as the satisfying sound of flesh striking flesh filled the air. Malfoy collapsed with the force of the blow and

landed on the cold stone ground with a dull thud, staring at Harry with a mixture of shock and disbelief.

The two thugs stared at Harry for a split second, their thick heads unable seemingly unable to comprehend what had just happened. A moment later, when the first signs of anger formed on their faces, Harry moved as a blur and lashed out with his foot. The biggest boy of the two cried out in pain as Harry delivered a few sharp kicks to the knee, enough to make him lose his balance and send him collapsing to the ground. He turned to the other one with a decidedly dangerous glint in his eye, but the thug had already backed off, raising his hand warily.

Harry smiled coldly and looked down at Malfoy, who was staring at him from the ground in a mixture of horror and anger. One of his pale hands was touching a split lip and when Malfoy looked down at it, he saw red blood.

“You’ll pay for this,” He promised furiously. “I swear I’ll make you pay for this! My father is...”

Harry sighed and withdrew his wand, levelling it at Malfoy. The Slytherin boy flinched and went still, staring at the wand with fear.

“Got anything else to say?” Harry asked softly.

Malfoy was silent, pale with fear and wearing an expression of deep hatred. However, he didn’t look particularly threatening lying on the ground with a bloodied lip, so the effect was lost on Harry.

“Good,” The young Denarian said smiled coldly. He turned away and then paused as a thought struck, turning around again.

With a quick and vicious movement, he drove his foot into Malfoy’s stomach. Malfoy gave a wheezing gasp of pain and suddenly looked very sick. His stomach, bloated with an extra-rich Christmas breakfast, rumbled in protest as Malfoy brought up his food with horrible retching noises. Harry quickly stepped back, looking at both Malfoy the vomit with disgust.

“Don’t you ever go running to the papers again,” Harry said quietly as Malfoy stared up at him with pained pale eyes. “Or I’ll do something much worse to you.”

He turned around again and walked away from the fallen Slytherin, an astonished Amanda following after him. After a few moments, Amanda couldn’t keep the questions contained anymore and they burst out of her.

“Why did you do that?” She asked in disbelief.

“Well, it was fun,” Harry admitted with a smile. “And, he called me a scar-head. I found that very insulting, you know. I do not have a scar on my head.”

Amanda blinked and hesitated.

“Um...yes you do,” she said and pointed to his forehead, where, behind his black bangs, a part of his lightning-bolt scar could be seen. “It’s right there. I can see it.”

“Oh,” Harry uttered in a surprised tone and reached for his forehead. He pasted a look of worry on his face and stopped, turning around and staring down the corridor he had left Malfoy. “Well, then, this is embarrassing. Say, you think I should go back and apologise?”

“I don’t think he would like that,” Amanda advised, wincing as she thought of Malfoy lying in a puddle of his own vomit.

Harry suddenly looked a lot more interested and Amanda sighed, clasping his arm with her hand. She ignored his look of warning and tugged at it, trying to drag him in the opposite direction and towards the Great Hall. But he didn’t budge and Amanda sighed.

“Can we go eat while there’s still some breakfast?” She asked with a sigh.

“Well, I am hungry,” Harry said thoughtfully and with a shrug, tugged his arm away from Amanda and started walking to the Great Hall. Later that day, while the rest of students were playing outside in the snow, playing with their presents or generally having a good time, Harry was inside the abandoned classroom he had turned into his unofficial training room. It had changed a lot since he had first arrived and there were several shattered, burnt and crushed desks lying in a twisted heap of wreckage in the centre of the room. Although Meciél was quite determined in making Harry master at least the basics of Transfiguration, she hadn’t held back on her knowledge of dark magic and Harry had learnt some very interesting curses due to his dark magic practise. At the moment though, Harry was sitting in one of the few remaining chairs and jabbing his wand at the feather on the table in front of him.

‘Now, beloved, concentrate,’ Meciél said softly. ‘The feather must become a rock. However, this is particularly hard because of the inverse relationship between the mass of the two objects. You need focus.’

Harry wore a frown of concentration on his face and jabbed his wand again. The feather twitched and suddenly burst into a small puff of flames, oily black smoke rising towards the roof. Harry extinguished the fire and vanished the smoke with a flick of his wand and scowled as Meciél mentally sighed.

‘Concentration is the key,’ She said, a touch impatiently. ‘You need to focus on only channelling wand-magic through your wand, blocking all hellfire. There will be a time where you will be able to do this subconsciously, but for now, you need...’

“Focus,” Harry interrupted with an annoyed grunt. “I need focus, yeah, I get it. What I also need is for invisible demons to stop talking inside my head and ruining my concentration. I might be able to ‘focus’ then.”

“Is this better?” Came Meciél’s voice and Harry’s eyes flickered to his right, where Meciél’s illusion sat on top of one of the tables. She

wore an almost-transparent silver and white dress; abstaining from the Wizarding robes she had gained a fondness of over the past few months.

“Honestly, no,” Harry said flatly and cocked his head. “It does look good on you, though.”

“Really?” Meciél asked and smoothed her dress over her legs, looking down at herself. “You don’t think it’s a little too revealing?”

“It looks like it was made to tempt,” Harry said and gave a mischievous grin. “So it suits you. Besides, it makes you look beautiful.”

“That compliment doesn’t mean much coming from a hormonal fourteen-year-old boy,” Meciél rebuked but she had a slight smile on her face. Harry made a face at her and turned back to the burnt feather, clearing the scorched areas with a wave of his wand.

“Okay, feather to rock, take two,” He muttered and jabbed the feather again. It twitched but otherwise did nothing, and Harry sighed.

“This is boring,” He complained with a scowl. “Let’s perfect that hex we were doing the other day, the one that liquefies bones. That was fun. Or better yet, let’s go and skip training for a day. It is Christmas, you know.”

“You always need to be prepared for your enemies,” Meciél said, folding her hands onto her lap. “They will strike when they can and they will not care if it is Christmas, Easter, your birthday or Guy Fawkes Day.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Harry muttered but grudgingly nodded and went back to the feather. “I know I need to be prepared, especially since I seem to have more enemies now.”

“Indeed,” Meciél agreed, her silver eyes watching him carefully. “You’re more of a target now than you have ever been before. You need to be cautious and alert....”

She was interrupted by a loud curse from Harry's mouth as the feather flared up with flames once again. Harry scowled at it and gripped his wand, looking as if there was nothing more he would like to do than blow the damn thing up.

"Focus," Meciél chided.

"Ah, stuff it," Harry muttered and leaned back in his chair, turning to face Meciél's illusion. "Besides, I can't focus when I'm all depressed about thinking how people want to kill me. I mean, why would they want to? I'm so damn loveable."

Meciél cocked her eyebrows at him but Harry ignored her as he kicked at the table moodily.

"My enemies would be a lot easier to avoid if I wasn't bound to the stupid tournament," Harry said, but he had a frown on his face. "I'm still trying to figure out what exactly the person who signed me up has achieved. It wasn't Nicodemus, or whoever is controlling him, because they wouldn't have sent a Drakon after me if they wanted me alive and they wouldn't have bound me into the tournament if they wanted me away from the Carpenter brats. Damn, I wish I wasn't bound to this damn tournament."

"But you are so you must focus," Meciél said quietly and her illusion stood up, walking across the room and placing a slim hand on Harry's shoulder. Harry could smell her body behind him, a sweet and slightly perfumed scent, and he was silently impressed. When Meciél made an illusion, she did it all the way.

"I know, I know," Harry muttered and sighed. "I'll be a lot happier as soon as this damn tournament is over and I'm away from this stupid school, away from Nicodemus, away from the goody-good Knights and all that crap. I miss the apartment."

"Oh?" Meciél said lightly, but Harry frowned as he detected something deeper in her voice. "You will be glad to leave this place? Including Amanda?"

“What do you mean?” Harry asked slowly and twisted his head to stare at Meciél. The Fallen looked slightly hesitant and seemed to choose her words carefully.

“I do not believe she is a good choice for a friend,” Meciél said slowly.

“She’s not friend,” Harry disagreed immediately. “I have no friends, remember?”

“If she is not a friend then why are you protecting her?” Meciél asked and there was an edge to her voice that made Harry blink in surprise.

“I’m not,” Harry said slowly, a frown on his face. “I want to piss off Nicodemus and piss off the Knight. It’s a double-win. Why do you care anyway?”

Meciél was silent but Harry could feel her presence in his mind and felt the barest flash of emotion. His jaw dropped as he identified it and he stared at Meciél with an incredulous smile on his face.

“Hang on,” He said slowly, his eyes wide. “Are you jealous?”

Meciél stared at him stonily, her beautiful features not showing an inch of human emotion. Harry’s smile fades and he shifted under her gaze, turning his head away.

“I’ll just...drop this subject now,” he muttered and turned back to feather, staring at it with a look of concentration on his face as he jabbed his wand at it. Nothing happened.

After a few moments, Meciél spoke up again, changing the clearly uncomfortable subject.

“Are you looking forward to the ball?” She asked and smiled in amusement as Harry made a face.

“Hell no!” He exclaimed and scowled. “I can’t dance, you know. I have no idea what I’m going to do.”

“I can take care of that for you, beloved,” Meciél offered generously.

“Thanks,” Harry said gratefully.

“It is not a problem,” Meciél said and toyed with the seams of her dress. “After all, I am always eager to serve.”

“Sure you are,” Harry said with a snort, but there were no harsh emotions in his tone, only fondness.

“You know,” Meciél started in amusement, walking into Harry’s field of sight as he stared down at the feather. “You get a lot of latitude as my host when compared to other Denarians.”

Harry looked amused.

“Really?” He asked with a smug expression on his face.

“Yes,” nodded Meciél, her face serious. “Many of the lesser Fallen would have crushed your mind by now and taken control of you to sate their desires of bloodlust. The other saner Fallen, would have punished you. After all, we do have a vast control over your nervous system and the ability to inflict pain and terror is quite easy to do.”

“Ah, you won’t do that,” Harry said confidentially, a small smile on his face.

“I could,” Meciél argued softly and she turned her silver eyes towards him, amusement flashing in them. “Why shouldn’t I?”

“Because you love me,” Harry said frankly. Meciél visibly flinched and her smile disappeared as she stared at Harry with wide eyes. Harry continued despite her reactions. “Or if you’re not capable of love, you have the next best thing, some degree of affection towards me.”

Meciel was silent, her face once again alien and remote.

“In other words,” Harry said and stared at Meciel with serious eyes. “You like me, Meciel.”

There was a few moments of silence in the room as Fallen and host eyed each other, Harry with open honesty and Meciel with a remote look on her face that made her seem as if she had been carved from a statue.

“Bold words,” Meciel said quietly, after a time. “There was a time when I would have killed the person who made such an implication.”

“During your big bad-arse days as a Knight of the Blackened Order of Denarius?” Harry asked, genuinely curious.

“I was a different then,” Meciel said thoughtfully, almost wistfully; a soft smile came over her face as she recalled old memories. “I commanded great power and great respect. I demanded fear and obedience from all. I was one of the most powerful beings on this world.”

Harry was silent, staring at Meciel with concern as something like sadness and bitterness came over her face and flooded into his mind. Suddenly Meciel visibly shook herself, both physically in the illusion and mentally within his head.

“But that was another time,” She finished softly and smiled at Harry affectionately. “You are right, of course. I do care for you, beloved, just as you care for me. This is why I do not demand total obedience. You are much more interesting to me as you are, rather than a slave to my will.”

“One day you’ll have to tell me all about the old days,” Harry said and returned Meciel’s affection, the constant dark expression on his face washed away by the smile on his face

“One day,” Meciél agreed and she fell silent. An instant later, the illusion disappeared and Harry felt her retreat back into his mind. He frowned in concern but sighed and turned back to the feather, jabbing it absently with his wand.

The feather twitched, then shimmered and slowly changed into a smooth dark rock. Harry blinked and a cocky smile came over his face as he jumped to his feet, raising his hands in the air as he bowed to an imaginary audience.

“Can I get a hell yeah?” He roared in triumph and he felt Meciél’s amusement in his mind.

Suddenly the rock twitched and flared up in flames. Harry flinched and took a startled step backwards, staring down at the desk with an annoyed scowl on his face. A flick of his wand took care of the fire, leaving a scorched and smouldering wooden desk.

‘Well done, beloved,’ Meciél said dryly.

“Oh shut up,” Harry muttered. He glanced around the room, seeking out another desk, when he caught a glance out the window. The sun was just going down and Harry frowned.

“It’s getting dark,” He said.

‘You should go and get ready for the ball,’ Meciél advised and Harry made a face.

“Do I have to?” He asked with a whine.

‘Yes,’ Meciél answered simply and Harry gave a long-suffering sigh.

“I have a hard life, you know” He muttered, kicking at the table moodily.

‘Of course you do, beloved.’

Note: It's come to my attention that I've made a mistake with Fawkes. Apparently 'she' in canon is a 'he'. For my purposes, should I ever decide to elaborate on Dumbledore's bargain, it's a lot easier with a 'she', so it will remain. Hey, this is an AU, you know....

Harry was leaning against one of the Gryffindor common room walls, staring idly outside at the bleak Christmas dusk. The sun had only gone down a few minutes ago but there were already a multitude of stars twinkling in the night sky. A cold wind howled outside, sending up sprays of white snow and hurling it off the Gryffindor tower roof where it had fallen.

Behind him, Harry noticed a sixth year boy dressed in up in some very fancy red robes escorting a fifth year girl out of the Common Room. Both wore beaming smiles on their faces and Harry gagged, rolling his eyes and looking away.

‘It is a shame that you have no other clothes to wear,’ Meciell remarked quietly.

Harry looked down at himself, absently brushing off his large overcoat and surveying the rest of his casual day-to-day clothes, the only clothes he owned. He frowned.

“What’s wrong with these?” He asked quietly, but defensively.

‘They are rather...plain,’ Meciell said wryly. ‘Well, for this occasion, anyway.’

“Since when do you care about this type of stuff?” Harry snorted.

‘It may come as a shock to learn that I once belonged and participated in the routines of the civilised class,’ Meciell said and paused. ‘Well, until I met you, that is.’

“I’m civilised,” Harry protested softly, drawing a strange look from one of the pairs leaving the Common Room. He scowled at them and smiled grimly as the boy and girl flinched and hurried out without another backwards glance.

‘Of course you are, beloved,’ Meciél said and Harry rolled his eyes.

“Harry?” Somebody broke in quietly and Harry didn’t need to turn around to recognise Amanda’s voice. “I’m ready.”

“It’s about damn time,” Harry muttered and spun around to face her and blinked.

Amanda seemed to have put the three hours up she had spent in her dorm to good use. Her hair had been done in a wave of elaborate curls that fell down her face and it glittered and twinkled in the firelight- a charm of some sort, no doubt. She wore a fancy robe of periwinkle-blue and silver, with a golden trim and was smiling rather nervously at Harry. She bit her lip under his rather flat gaze and gestured to herself with a nervous laugh.

“Do I pass? She asked hesitantly.

“I’ve seen better,” Harry said instantly, and Amanda’s smile faded and she fidgeted on her feet, her eyes downcast.

‘Oh, beloved,’ Meciél sighed. ‘You have no idea.’

“But I’ll admit that you do scrub up nicely.” Harry finished and frowned. “And you’re less likely to steal my soul. That counts for something.”

Amanda perked up; giving him a brilliant smile and Harry restrained the urge to smirk as his mind sought out Meciél.

‘I have no idea, do I?’ Harry thought as Amanda glided forward and latched onto his arm. His smile disappeared and Harry twitched, restraining the urge to throw off the unfamiliar touch.

“You look nice too,” Amanda said as the two of them walked out of the Gryffindor Common Room.

“I’m wearing what I always wear,” Harry said slowly.

“Well, I know,” Amanda said and blushed. “I was just saying that...you look alright...I mean, did you wash them or something...not that I’m implying that you don’t wash your clothes, it’s just that...you know, never mind.”

“What the hell?” Harry said, staring at Amanda with a bewildered expression on his face. Amanda’s cheeks were still red but she held her head high and met his stare boldly. Harry blinked, sighed and rolled his eyes. “Whatever.”

Harry watched as the last of the students entered the Great Hall with an annoyed frown on his face. His stomach gave a small rumble and he sighed impatiently, scuffing at the ground with his foot. Next to him, Amanda was chatting in an excited voice with Hermione, Krum’s partner. Their constant giggles were getting very annoying and for a moment, Harry met Krum’s eyes with shared resignation. Behind them, Fleur was talking to her partner, a Ravenclaw who stared at the French witch with adoration in his eyes. Cedric had taken a slight Asian girl Harry had never seen before and Richard, the Salem champion, had taken one of the Salem students, a tall brunette girl.

McGonagall strode from the Great Hall and approached the group of champions. Harry blinked and had to restrain a laugh as he saw her attire, a red tartan robe and a very ugly wreath of bristles around her witch’s hat.

“We are to enter the Great Hall in procession and approach the Head table,” She said stiffly, eying the Champions in front of her. When her eyes looked over Harry and his dress an expression of exasperation flickered over her face and she looked away with a sigh. “You will be sitting at the Head Table with the judges.”

“Ooh, front row seats,” Harry muttered and Amanda nudged him in the ribs. Harry glanced at her in annoyance but she stared forward determinedly as the pair in front of them, Krum and Hermione, started walking forward into the Great Hall.

When the procession walked into the Great Hall, they were all met with a wave of applause and cheers. Amanda blushed and ducked her head but Harry bristled with pleasure. The Great Hall was looking quite different, with its walls decked with silver frost and hundreds of garlands of mistletoe and ivy crossing the starry ceiling. The long house tables had been replaced with a hundred or so smaller ones, which seated a dozen people or so.

‘Wow,’ Harry heard Amanda breathe and her grip on his arm tightened as they approached the Head table, where the judges and the professor’s sat. However, a new addition to the table made Harry’s eyes narrow as he spotted Sanya sitting at one end, eying Amanda and Harry with a disgruntled and unhappy expression on his face.

Harry smiled at the Knights obvious disapproval and when he was directed to sit down, he passed Sanya’s seat and gave the large Russian man a sharp jab with his elbow. Sanya stiffened but otherwise did not react as Harry seated himself towards the other end of the table. Amanda sat down next to him and frowned, staring down at her golden plate where a small menu had been placed.

“This is nice, isn’t it?” She murmured to Harry.

“Sure it is,” Harry muttered back. “Just as nice as that scab I have on my back that I keep picking at.”

Amanda was reading through the menu but she paused, a disgusted look coming over her face. But it cleared up in an instant and she giggled at his response, making Harry shake his head and roll his eyes. He had the feeling that this was going to be a long night.

After dinner, Dumbledore instructed the students to stand up from their tables, and with a quick swish of his wand he directed the hundred or so odd tables to zoom back against the walls. With another flick of his wand, he conjured an entire raised platform, complete with instruments and the like. Harry couldn’t help but be impressed by the wand-work as a group of very hairy witches with ripped robes took to the stage.

“Could the champions please take their partners to the centre of the room?” Bagman asked cheerfully.

The other champions stood up from their seats and started to make their way down to the dance floor. Amanda left her seat as well, but when she turned to Harry he refused to budge with a reluctant scowl on his face.

“C’mon Harry,” Amanda said quietly and tugged at his sleeve. “The champions are meant to lead the first dance.”

“Really?” Harry said with an annoyed frown. “Thank you so much for enlightening me with your outstanding brilliance.”

“Harry, my boy!” Bagman said jovially as he came around the table. “It’s time for the champions to lead the dance. You and your pretty girl go and give them a good show, yeah?”

“I don’t dance,” Harry muttered and Bagman blinked.

“You can’t dance?” He asked and a momentary frown came over his face. It cleared up an instant later. “No matter then. It’s not hard and the first dance is always slow.”

“It’s not that I can’t dance,” Harry snapped. “It’s that I don’t want to.”

“Harry,” Bagman said with patient understanding. “I understand that this can be a little nerve-wracking, especially for a young man like you, but there are protocols that have to be observed. Don’t worry, I’m here for you. Just get through the first dance and who knows? Maybe you’ll like it, eh?”

Harry stared at Bagman blankly as the older man clapped him heartily on the shoulder.

“So, what do you say?” He asked cheerfully.

“Fine,” Harry said quietly and wrested his shoulder away from Bagman. He stood up and gave Amanda a disgruntled nod as he clasped her arm and led her to the dance floor.

“I didn’t think you’d say yes,” Amanda admitted as Harry led her to the front of the room, where the other champions awaited him with their partners.

“I could either agree with him or kill him right there and then,” Harry muttered sourly. “Trust me; the second option was really tempting.”

Amanda gave a soft laugh and smiled at him, making Harry frown. The two of them stood on the dance floor and waited for the Weird Sisters to start the song.

“Can you dance?” Harry asked Amanda quietly, ignoring the spectators as he focussed his gaze on Amanda’s face.

“Yeah,” She answered. “Can you?”

“Nope,” Harry answered honestly

Amanda blinked and frowned.

“So...” She said slowly. “Why are we on the dance floor?”

“I can’t dance,” Harry said and a mischievous, slightly dark grin came over his face. “However, Meciél can.”

“You have got to be kidding me,” Amanda said after a moment’s pause as she realised where he was going with this. “Are you serious?”

Harry gave her a feral smile.

“Now, Meciél,” He murmured softly. “Remember to play nice with the little girl.”

“Harry...” Amanda started, but she stopped and flinched as Harry changed beneath her eyes.

There was no outward physical change except for a slight flash of fire in Harry’s eyes. But the young Denarian seemed to hold himself differently, almost femininely if Amanda had to guess. There was an alien smile on his face as he stared down at Amanda and the blonde-haired girl suddenly got the feeling that Harry, or Meciél, didn’t really like her.

“Hello little girl,” Harry said quietly, with an odd hitch in his voice, and Amanda knew that it was Meciél talking. “Let’s dance, shall I?”

“Um...” Amanda hesitated, but Harry stepped into her personal space and draped an arm around her waist, holding her close to his chest. “I don’t...um...”

It was at that moment that the music started playing and Harry’s grip tightened around her waist, his eyes staring into hers.

“Meciél,” Harry said with exasperation and Amanda blinked, hearing Harry’s normal tone. “Play nice.”

“Very well,” Harry said a moment later, the voice slightly hitched, and started swaying to the music. Amanda was still hesitant but after a few moments, a reluctant smile came over her face and she started to dance with him.

Some time later, Harry felt himself walk away from the dance floor and felt Meciél’s blazing presence leave the front of his mind. Almost instantly, he regained control of his motor skills, the only visible sign being a slight stumble in step. Amanda, who was still clasping his arm, frowned at him in concern but Harry waved her away and took a seat at the nearest empty table.

Amanda took a seat next to him as Harry picked up a discarded goblet of juice. He frowned and gave the half-empty goblet a tentative sniff, before shrugging and chugging it down.

“The bowl’s been spiked, you know,” Amanda said conversationally and Harry made a face, blinking rapidly and shaking his head. When he dropped the goblet he felt a burning rush pour into his stomach, quite similar to the sensation of Hellfire.

“Oh yeah,” He wheezed and gave a grin. “I know now.”

Amanda giggled and Harry frowned, before giving an exasperated sigh and turned to her with a questioning expression on his face.

“Alright,” He declared flatly. “What is up with you? You’ve been acting weird all night.”

“Nothing is wrong with me,” Amanda defended herself but she blushed under Harry’s gaze and avoided his eyes.

Harry stared at her for a second longer and then made a face, looking away and staring at the dance floor. He saw Dumbledore dancing with the enormous Headmistress of Beauxbatons and shuddered as a vile mental image formed in his mind.

‘Was that thought necessary?’ Meciél asked in disgust. ‘You, nor I, really needed to think about that.’

Harry sniggered and idly scanned the dance floor as he took another sip of the spiked drink, enjoying the feel of alcohol burning in his stomach. He saw the Knight, Sanya, and Molly dancing and frowned.

“Why aren’t you talking to your friends or whatever?” He asked Amanda, who seemed puzzled at the question.

“Because I’m your date,” Amanda answered slowly and placed her hand on Harry’s arm.

“Oh, please don’t say that,” Harry groaned and pulled his arm away.

“It’s true,” Amanda said with small smile on her face and giggled as he made a face. “Hey, you asked me to the dance, remember.”

Harry sighed and turned back to the dance floor, when a particular scent suddenly hit his nose. He stiffened as he felt an icy breeze on his back, and he heard a soft tinkling laughter behind him, cold and without remorse. Next to him, Amanda turned around and gasped with awe and envy, while around them students and couples gaped at the spectacle. Harry took a deep breath, steeling himself and turned around.

Behind him stood Maeve, or at least, a human equivalent of Maeve. She wore a sheer icy gown that clung to her body, leaving very little to the imagination. She wore a wreath of glittering icicles around her neck and her eyes burned with an inner storm as she glided forward sensually. She was beautiful, more beautiful than even Fleur was; the latter watching from the dance floor with a disgruntled frown as her dance partner stared at Maeve with an open mouth.

“Hello, my little renegade,” Maeve said softly, sensually, and Harry swallowed at her tone. Excitement, pleasure, anxiety- they all rushed through his body at once and he had to gript the table to sit up straight as Maeve took the seat on his right.

Amanda was watching all of this with narrowed eyes, taking in both Maeve’s sensual tone and Harry’s fixation on the newcomer, and she planted a friendly and very fake smile on her face.

“Hi,” She said cheerfully, although the smile didn’t reach her eyes. “You must be a friend of Harry’s, I’m...”

“A stupid and average little mortal,” Maeve interrupted coldly, her green eyes flicking over towards Amanda. She seemed to assess the girl and scorn appeared on her face, as if she had found Amanda clearly lacking.

Amanda flinched at both the tone and the rather frank appraisal and she looked at Harry, who was staring at Maeve with something like hunger on his face, his knuckles white as they clutched the table. Her eyes glittered with emotion and she rose from the table, excusing herself with a soft murmur and walking away. Maeve didn’t seem to care and Harry barely noticed it as he drank in Maeve with his eyes.

“Maeve,” He said softly, hungrily, and Maeve smiled, licking her lips and placing a hand on his arm. At the contact, Harry jumped as if he had been burned and broke away.

‘A glamour!’ Meciél hissed. ‘Illusionary sensations and feelings! Fight it!’

However, Harry didn’t need to be told this as he sought out Hellfire. Roaring liquid fire burned into his veins, sulphur filled his nostrils and suddenly his mind was encased in a brick wall, held together by searing flames. The icy-cold glamour shattered and Maeve flinched, a brief moment of discomfort showing on her face. When she turned back to Harry, fully composed, she was met with his blank face and hard eyes.

“Why are you here?” He asked flatly.

“Why not?” Maeve countered softly and ran her pale hand over his arm. Harry broke apart the glamour’s she induced before they even had a chance to generate sensation.

Maeve smiled and Harry knew that she could, with some effort, easily enthrall him long enough to harm or kill him. However, she withdrew her hand and placed them on her lap in a mocking gesture of serenity.

“Well, my first answer to that would be the wards around this building,” Harry said curtly. “The second answer would be Fawkes.”

A flicker of anger came over Maeve’s face at the mention of the Summer Fae’s name but it was gone in an instant.

“I have spoken to that pathetic bird,” She said softly. “And she has agreed to let me remain here for a single night. The bargain we struck was high, I assure you. As for the wards, well, with this pathetic mortal event occurring, Hogwarts is far more vulnerable than you realise.”

“Oh, you came all this way and expended all this effort for little old me?” Harry mocked and placed his hand on his chest. “And here there were people telling me that I had no friends. Good to know that you care, Maeve.”

“Oh, I care,” Maeve said and her cold smile was enough to make Harry shudder. “I have plans for you, little Denarian.”

“Plans?” Harry asked softly, dangerously. “I recall a single bargain between us. That’s all.”

“I know that,” Maeve said and her eyes met Harry intently. “But it always starts out as one. We’re not done with each other, Harry, not in the slightest.”

“I have no intentions of becoming a pawn for the Winter Court,” Harry said scornfully and shook his head “And with our bargain, well, it was a one time deal. I have no intention of wrestling with a Drakon again either.”

“ We’ll see,” Maeve said softly, as if she had taken Harry’s declaration as a challenge. Her expression suddenly became seductive and she smiled, running her hand on his arm. “And speaking of our bargain, I want to conclude it tonight.”

Harry blinked and swallowed, but he had suspected that that was the reason Maeve was here. He forced himself to look relaxed as he took another sip of the spiked drink, although he didn’t allow himself to drink too much. It would be better to be his toes when conversing with a Faerie Queen.

“What if now’s not a good time,” He asked casually and looked away, ignoring the stares he was getting from the other students.

Maeve, however, seemed to relish them, but her expression darkened as she gripped Harry’s arm painfully. When Harry turned his head to look at her warningly, there was a cold and alien look in Maeve’s eyes and her voice was brittle when she spoke.

“You made a bargain,” She said icily. “And you will fulfil it.”

“Fine,” Harry said, ignoring her hand and putting down his drink in a show of nonchalance. But there was a coil of excitement in the pit of his stomach and his heart rate increased as anticipation sung through his veins. Meciél was monitoring his reactions with growing disapproval, but Harry ignored her as Maeve distracted him with a question.

“I assume you’re a virgin,” The Winter Lady asked casually, making Harry’s eyebrows rise.

“Yeah,” Harry answered after a moment’s pause, adopting his usual mocking tone. “I didn’t get out a lot growing up and I’m only fourteen, you know. It kinda makes me wonder about your sexual preferences, you being hundreds of years old and all that.”

Maeve smiled and ran her fingernails down Harry’s arm, making him both wince with pain and shudder with pleasure at the feelings she evoked.

“That’s good then,” She murmured and leant her head down to his ear. “It should make it more fun for me.”

Harry almost shuddered at her tone and swallowed, desperately seeking to divert attention away from Maeve’s ministrations.

“So, how are things?” He asked after a few moments, staring away from Maeve and onto the dance floor, where another song had started. Couples moved off to dance while Maeve let out a throaty chuckle, her breath on his ear.

“Oh, didn’t your little spy tell you anything?” She asked and Harry tensed, a tingle of dread running into his veins. He forced himself to relax as much as he could and turned his head to stare at Maeve with a puzzled expression on his face.

“I have a spy now?” He asked. “Ooh, if I do then I have to name him Agent Sixty-Nine. It’s an innuendo, you see.”

“Don’t play the stupid boy act with me,” Maeve spat, her pleasant expression disappearing in an instant. Her eyes were cold as she gripped his arm tightly. “I know of the one you call Cessbulby indiscretions. But I allowed it to continue. It was in my best interests to see you alive, after all.”

“That’s nice,” Harry said with a wince and firmly reached over with his other hand, clasping Maeve’s fingers and carefully prying them off his arm. Maeve had regained her slightly-amused and sensual expression and watched him with humour in her eyes, but she allowed him to continue and unclasped her hand.

“So, is my...spy...alright?” Harry asked, avoiding Maeve’s eyes as he rubbed his sore arm with a frown on his face.

“She is fine,” Maeve said idly. A genuine smile appeared on her face as she stared at him oddly. “My, is that real concern from you?”

“Hey, I like her,” Harry said defensively. He paused. “I don’t like you, for the record.”

“You want me,” Maeve whispered softly and her tone sent shivers down Harry’s back.

“So what?” He snorted, shrugging his shoulders carelessly. “You’re hot. Half the people in the room want you. Besides, you also tend to be a complete bitch.”

Rather than taking offence, Maeve smiled sensually and leaned back in her chair, seemingly satisfied with his answer.

“Yes,” She murmured. “I suppose I do.”

The two sat in silence for the next minutes as Harry’s imagination provided some very colourful images of what he was going to be doing later that night. However, all thoughts of ‘sporting’ with Maeve fled his mind as Sanya broke away from the crowd on the dance floor and approached him, looking wary.

“Where is Amanda?” He asked Harry curtly, glancing at Maeve with narrowed eyes. “And why is this Winter Fae here?”

“The brat left,” Harry responded just as curtly. “She should be somewhere in the hall. As for why the Fae’s here, well, if you expect me to tell you of all people then you can go and kiss my...”

“She’s not,” Sanya interrupted him impatiently, his dark eyes sweeping the Great Hall as if he was trying to confirm his statement. “She’s left.”

Harry frowned and turned away from Maeve, looking out into the hundreds of couples and Professor’s, but he didn’t see Amanda’s blonde head anyway and he let out growl of annoyance.

“Stupid girl,” He muttered, but shook his head and turned back to Sanya. “Oh well, she’s not here then. Happy hunting.”

“Help me find her,” Sanya said, almost reluctantly, and Harry blinked.

“What?” He asked incredulously.

“I get the feeling she’s in trouble,” Sanya said and Harry stood up, staring at Sanya carefully as he slid his hand into his robe, gripping his wand.

“Sit back down, Harry,” Maeve said softly, sensually, and patted the seat next to her. “You could always sit on my lap, if you want to. I wouldn’t mind.”

Harry, however, ignored her and stared at the Knight intently.

“When you say feeling,” Harry said slowly. “Do you mean feeling as in ‘Oh, I think my wallet is in my other knickers’ or feeling as in ‘God to Sanya, God to Sanya- You need to take a left here’?”

Sanya frowned, trying to digest Harry's sentence. After a few moments, he straightened up and lifted his cloak, revealing the hilt of his rapier-like Sword of the Cross.

"The second one," He said flatly. "I've had the feeling for a while now, but now it's urgent. I think Nicodemus is here."

"He's here?" Harry breathed, a dark glitter coming into his eyes.

"Maybe," Sanya admitted, shrugging slightly to himself. "It's not always right."

But Harry didn't appear to hear him. Within his mind, Meciél radiated a burning sense of hatred and desire for revenge, and Harry straightened up, his face reflecting a cold smile.

"Let's go." He said softly.

"Denarian..." Maeve started but Harry waved her off, Hellfire blazing in the pit of his stomach and neutralising any effect she may have had on him as he followed Sanya. Molly joined the group, a look of concern and determination on her face as the three of them left the hall.

The hallways were deserted as Harry, Sanya and Molly walked through them, their footsteps sounding particularly loud. Harry followed Sanya, allowing the Knight to lead him wherever he needed to be. He held his wand out in his right hand but when Sanya came to a corner and stiffened, he reached into his clothes and pulled out a small metallic toothpick. Sanya blinked at him, but Harry merely waves his wand and suddenly the toothpick shot out into a fully-grown sword, etched with runes and all.

"That must be useful," Sanya said quietly.

"It's a new spell," Harry admitted and he flipped his wand into his left hand and clasped his right around the hilt of the sword. "After the First Task, I thought it would be better to keep the sword on me at all times."

Sanya nodded and gestured at the corner, his hand tightening around the hilt of his sword. Molly reached into her robes and pulled out her blasting rod. She took a deep breath and nodded at Sanya, who turned to look at Harry. Harry merely rolled his eyes, holding wand and sword, and ignoring Knight and True Wizard, he strode around the corner.

The first thing he saw was Amanda, right at the other end, and he frowned. She was running towards them, an expression of terror on her face. His eyes flicked over towards Amanda for an instant and suddenly he blood ran cold as he saw the deep cut of in her robe. Sanya gave a low growl and Harry heard Molly breathe her sister's name as they both started sprinting towards her. Harry growled in annoyance and jogged behind them, his eyes peeled at every shadow and every crevice, as if he expected Nicodemus to jump out at any moment. However, his caution was unneeded.

As Amanda hurtled towards them, relief starting to flicker over her face, a dark mass of shadows warped behind her, boiling and flickering as if they were alive. Amanda must have heard something and glanced over her shoulder. She let out a loud scream of terror as she spotted the shadows, which were easily keeping up with her.

Suddenly, her scream was cut short as something silver and glittery protruded from the front of her robes. She looked down, staring at the sword in her stomach with stunned eyes, shuddering and twitching with pain. Behind her, the shadows boiled and writhed, casting eerie shadows over the hallway as they hovered around their victim.

“Amanda!” Molly frantically screamed, and Harry vaguely heard Sanya angrily snarling but for the whole, all Harry was aware of was a white buzz of rage in his ears as Amanda twitched, impaled on the blood-covered blade.

He was close enough that when Amanda looked up, he could see a trickle of blood dripping from the corner of her mouth. Pained and disbelieving blue eyes met Harry's burning emerald orbs and Harry felt something dig in his stomach, fury boiling his veins as great hatred flared up in his mind and quickened his step. Amanda was

staring at him, a stunned expression on her face, before her eyes suddenly glazed over and she fell forward, landing on the ground with a shallow thump. She gave a few twitches and then fell still, blood pooling from her prone form.

“Get away from her!” Molly screamed, brandishing her blasting rod. The tip glowed with an incandescent white, bright flare of power and the shadows moved back, allowing Molly to drop to her knees by her sister’s side. The elder Carpenter girl looked both aghast and distraught; her hands shaking as she frantically examined the wound.

Harry strode forward, his eyes blazing with Hellfire and curls of smoke rising from the runes on his wand and sword. Next to him, Sanya spared Amanda a single heartbroken glance and moved forward to stand by the young Denarian to confront the mass of shadows. Molly remained on her knees, one hand pressed on her sister’s stomach as she desperately tried to contain the injury and the other absently stroke Amanda’s face.

“Show yourself, Nicodemus!” Sanya boomed angrily, his voice blasting through the hallway like a single crisp note on a trumpet. “Show yourself, murderer!”

The shadows quivered and parted, a man stepping out from them. He was a man of medium height and build, with short, dark hair streaked through with an off-centre blaze of silver. He wore a tan trench coat, casually open. His clothes were tailor-fit to him and looked very expensive, although they were grubby and torn from recent times of hardship. At first glance, it seemed as if a slender grey tie hung loosely around his throat, but on closer inspection it revealed itself to be a hangman’s noose. The expression on his face was mild, amused, and his dark eyes were half-closed and sleepy-looking.

Within his hands he held a thin curved blade, a Japanese katana with worn hilt and bloodied blade. He stared at the group in front of him; Sanya and Harry, who had moved forward to confront him, and Molly, who was crouched by her sister’s side, glancing up at the older Denarian with hatred on her face. On the ground, Amanda gave another twitch and then fell limp once more. This time, she remained

completely unmoving, blood pooling from her body and spreading out around her. Nicodemus glanced at the fallen blonde and gave a smile of satisfaction that made Harry want to bash the man's head in.

"Ah, what do we have here?" Nicodemus murmured softly with a faint British accent, sounding seemingly unconcerned. "It's a Knight—"

Sanya withdrew his rapier with a metallic hiss and silver fire flashed on the holy blade.

"The Wizard,"

Molly pressed Amanda's hands over her stomach and then lifted her blasting rod, a bright flare of true-magic cackling and hissing at the very tip.

"And the Renegade,"

Harry stared at Nicodemus with burning emerald eyes, billows of dirty black smoke rising from his wand. Hellfire burned in his veins and hatred rode in his mind as he gripped both wand and sword and prepared to attack.

"It's good that you're here," Nicodemus said softly, and his smile disappeared. For a moment, a raging madness flickered in his dark eyes and took a step forward, the shadows behind him, writhing and boiling as if they were alive. "It seems I have matters to settle with all of you."

“Nicodemus,” Sanya said coldly. The tall Russian man was tense and although his eyes flickered over Amanda’s prone and bloodied body, his body was set in a rigid disciplined stance. He clenched his teeth as he controlled himself, gripping the hilt of his sword tightly.

Molly, on the other hand, was a picture of shock and grief, her eyes wet. She knelt down by Amanda’s side, making frantic movements with her hands as she murmured something under her breath. A soft white glow spread from her hands and seeped into her sister’s body. Molly sagged by the fallen blonde’s side but she gave a soft spluttered laugh of relief. Harry spared Amanda a single glance, noting that although the wound was still open and leaking blood, her chest was rising in slow and shallow breathing. He took a deep breath, Hellfire singing in his veins, before he turned his full attention onto Nicodemus. For his part, the other Denarian didn’t seem to care that Amanda had been temporarily stabilised and was staring at Sanya with an intent gaze.

“So, Knight,” He said softly in a dangerous tone, and the noose that hung loosely around his neck pulsed with a shadowy light. “We meet again. Tell me, did you really think I would let you live after you murdered my daughter?”

“There was no murder,” Sanya replied just as softly. “Only self-defence. It was your daughter that attacked us first, Nicodemus. She was the one at fault.”

“You sought her out,” Nicodemus said coldly. Although nothing in his stance changed, the noose around his neck quivered and the shadows behind him writhed and undulated, a frenzied mass of darkness. “You hunted her down.”

“She was killing innocent people,” Sanya replied, a determined glint coming into his eyes. His hand gripped the sword hilt at his waist and a faint silver glow flickered behind his burly fingers. “We did what we had to do. I feel no pride in your daughter’s death, Nicodemus, but I feel no regret either.”

“You will feel regret soon enough,” Nicodemus said threateningly and his eyes flickered over towards Harry, taking in the Denarian Renegade for the first time. “And you, traitor, you will regret interfering in my quest for revenge. However, I offer you one last chance to drop your weapons and leave. My quarrel is not with you, not at the moment. Do this and I will let you live.”

‘Would he honour that?’ Harry asked Meciél hesitantly, although he continued to stare at Nicodemus with burning emerald eyes.

‘Unlikely, beloved,’ Meciél answered and a note of pure hatred entered her voice. ‘If you want to live then you must kill him! You have a better chance at that with one of the Knights of the Cross by your side! Strike him down, beloved! Strike him down with all of your power!’

“So, you’re the infamous Nicodemus,” Harry mused idly, cocking his head and regarding the man with hatred on his face as Meciél’s emotions bled into his own. His lip curled and he gave a mocking derisive grin. “Funny. From what I’ve been led to believe, I expected you to be a little...”

“Ah, the pre-fight banter,” Nicodemus murmured in amusement and the shadows twisted and writhed behind him as if they were laughing. “I do detest this part of the fight, but I will indulge you. So, what did you expect me to be, a little taller?”

“No,” Harry replied coldly, his eyes never leaving Nicodemus. His smile cleared up and his eyes glinted with power as dark fire roared into his body. “From what I’ve heard, I expected you to be a worthless and pathetic nobody who has no power, no worth and no intelligence. I expected you to be someone who was so fucked up in the head that he rutted with his own bitch of a daughter, a worthless slut who got was coming to her. I expected someone who was so appalling, ugly and fat that he drove people away with his very presence. Imagine my surprise when I look at you and see that you’re definitely not as fat as I was led to believe.”

“Ah,” Nicodemus sighed, shaking his head and shaking his head mockingly. “This is why I hate bantering. Well, if we are done with the necessary pre-fight conversations, shall we get down to business now. After all, revenge is a dish best served immediately.”

Suddenly he was moving, gliding forward and bringing his sword around. The shadow boiled around him in anticipation and dark pleasure crossed Nicodemus’ face as he prepared to take his revenge. Next to him, Sanya let out a loud roar of defiance and surged forward to meet the other Denarian. There was a low thrum of power, a flash of silver, and the hiss of a blade cutting the air as he withdrew the heavy sabre at his waist

Nicodemus moved quicker than the liquid-like shadows spreading out behind him and his blade came up, parrying the knight’s sword with a single easy movement. Metal clanged on metal as the two men duelled with incredible skill, parrying thrusts and slashes. Dozens of sparks of blue lightning zapped into the air as holy light clashed against unholy shadow. In the first few seconds of the battle the two men had already exchanged a dozen blows. Nicodemus was easily forcing Sanya back, but there was a sudden bright flare and the Knight’s blade glowed with a steady silver flame, throbbing with a deep steady strength.

Nicodemus hissed and took a step backwards, his shadow pulsing furiously as the light drove him back. However, an aura of darkness and shadows pulsated from the noose around his neck, seemingly absorbing the silver flare of light, and Nicodemus grinned and advanced, his blade whipping up to clash against Sanya’s.

Meanwhile, Harry winced as a wave of foul and disgusting holiness radiated from the Knight’s blade. There was an irritating burning sensation on his unprotected face as the blade burned with silver light but he ignored it and moved forward, lowering his sword and raising his wand. Although Meciél had implanted knowledge into his memory and manipulated his brain and nervous system with new reflexive behaviours, his skill with a sword was not in the league of Nicodemus, or even Sanya. However, his skill in magic was far from lacking.

As the two men battled, Harry allowed Hellfire to flow into his wand as he levelled it at his other hand. A roaring scent of sulphur filled his nostrils but Harry could barely register it as hatred flowed through his mind, emanating from both himself and Meciél. His face was contorted into an ugly mask of rage as a thin slither of oily smoke curled from his wand and a bright flare of yellow fire grew at the tip, flowing into his hands like liquid fire. It only took a matter of moments before a blazing pool of liquid Hellfire rested in his hands and Harry gave a malicious grin. With a deft flick of his wrist, Harry hurled it towards the duelling Nicodemus. The ball of fire left his hand with a deafening roar and Harry gave a loud bark of dark laughter as it zoomed towards Nicodemus.

Nicodemus made no move to counter or even dodge the searing ball of Hellfire and he continued to clash swords against Sanya at a furious pace. However, the noose around his neck pulsed with darkness and his shadow boiled frenziedly. With an eerie hiss, it jumped forward at the ball of fire. Harry blinked in surprise and shadow and fire met as the ball of Hellfire exploded with a deafening roar. The ground and walls seemed to shudder as a wave of fire blasted forward from the explosion, but the living shadow shot forward and surrounded it, stifling the fire with its darkness.

“Fuck,” Harry hissed angrily and gave a quick flick with his wand as the last vestiges of fire disappeared under the shadow’s power.

“Exturbo Arduro!” He growled angrily, thrusting his wand forward. A gout of searing flame jutted from the tip of his wand, striking at the shadow, but the shadowy form of Nicodemus raised its hands and cold darkness pooled there, a concave disk of dark energy that met the flame and absorbed it, scattered it and sent smaller bolts of fire ricocheting around the hallway, splashing on the walls and floor in small, blazing puddles.

An instant later, the shadow lanced forward towards Harry and the young Denarian could almost see a rippling expression of eagerness on its face. He took a startled step backwards, his eyes widening as he poured Hellfire into his wand. A bright fire grew at the tip of his wand but the shadow was upon him and Harry gave a cry of shock as

something struck him across the face. Harry tasted blood and grunted in pain as something slammed into his stomach. He doubled over and his wand was ripped from his hand as he was sent tumbling backwards towards the ground. For a moment, Harry was completely defenceless and he stared up at the shadow. Fear coiled in his gut and his eyes widened with shock as the shadow twisted and boiled in anticipation.

Luckily for Harry, the shadow halted. For a second, it strained against an invisible force as it desperately tried to move forward, before it gave a piercing and eerie howl and snapped back towards Nicodemus, who had moved down the other end of the corridor. Sanya continued to fight, silver fire battling against Nicodemus' powers. Nicodemus twirled his blade, deflecting jabs and thrusts, and he slashed it towards Sanya, who grimaced as he retreated.

Blasts of dark bolts of cackling magic burst from Nicodemus' outstretched hand but Sanya deflected them with his sword, the silver fire breaking apart the powerful spells with ease. It almost didn't seem right that Sanya was able to fight back as Nicodemus moved with a speed and skill that far outmatched that of the Knight. But fate seemed to be on his side and he was able to defend himself against all of Nicodemus' attacks and even launch his own. However, not even fate could save him from injury and Sanya hissed as Nicodemus' blade sliced into his chest, drawing fresh blood. Nicodemus bared his teeth and gave a hiss of pleasure and continued his assault.

On the other side of the corridor, Harry groaned as he staggered back on his feet.

'Ouch,' He mentally groaned, just as Meciél sent a wave of warmth that soothed his aches and pains. 'What the hell is that? I've never seen a spell like it!'

'That is not a spell!' Meciél hissed urgently. 'That is Nicodemus' demonic form! It is a very formidable opponent, especially since Nicodemus can utilise while remaining in his human form!'

‘Fucking hell,’ Harry growled and spotted his wand lying on the ground. He outstretched his hand and it flew from the ground and into his palm. His eyes glanced down the hallway and a malicious smile curved his lips as he levelled it at Nicodemus’s back.

‘Beloved...’ Meciël started.

Harry ignored her voice and slashed his wand through the air. Magic flashed through his veins and burst into existence as an arc of glimmering silver magic, which resembled an arrowhead. It shot through the air with great force and blasted upon the unsuspecting Nicodemus’ back, slicing into cloth, skin and bone. Sanya had to throw himself to the side as the blast of silver magic exploded out of Nicodemus’ chest and zoomed past him, smashing on the wall and sending crumbling bits of stone to the ground. Nicodemus halted, his entire body trembling, and Harry felt a vicious streak of triumph surge into his body. It was over.

His triumph faded and a dawning horror appeared on his face as Nicodemus turned around. Harry had expected to see fear or pain on the man’s face, but there was just amusement as Nicodemus glanced down at his injury. He touched it with his hand and smiled coldly and the skin began to knit itself back together. Nicodemus looked up again, bringing up his blood-covered hand and Harry watched as the blood boiled and dissolved into a shadowy mist. The noose around his neck pulsed with an eerie darkness and Nicodemus’ eyes flashed with the dark fires of hell as he stared at Harry murderously.

Behind him, Sanya surged forward, seeking to plant his blade in Nicodemus’ back, but Nicodemus’ shadow sprung up and shadow met silver fire with a burning hiss. Sanya struggled against Nicodemus’ demonic form but advanced underneath an onslaught of dark power while the real Nicodemus shook his head wryly. Blood dripped from the wound and turned to mist but Nicodemus didn’t seem to be affected as he whipped his blade behind him and deflected Sanya’s sword from taking his head off.

The elder Denarians eyes promised pain as he glared at Harry one last time, and then he turned around and began to duel with Sanya

again, both solid and shadow figures surging forward and sending Sanya backwards as shadow swallowed silver flame.

‘As I was saying, beloved,’ Meciél continued curtly. ‘Nicodemus cannot be killed by conventional means! He is immortal- and not just the immunity against aging that all Denarians possess!’

‘What the hell else can I do then?’ Harry growled as he levelled his wand at Nicodemus’ back. He concentrated, bringing Hellfire and wand-magic to bear as he flicked it sharply towards Nicodemus, listening to Meciél’s next words as a cone of dark light flickered into existence at the tip of his wand, similar to a simple lumos charm, but infinitely more dangerous.

‘The noose!’ Meciél hissed urgently. ‘The noose around his neck! All of Nicodemus’ magic flows into it, granting him immunity against magical and physical damage! If you can remove it, he will be just as vulnerable as you are to conventional damage and I assure you, the next spell you hit him with will kill him!’

Harry frowned and eyed the noose around Nicodemus’ neck, which pulsed angrily as Nicodemus continued to battle with Sanya, metal clashing in flares of shadow and silver light. Harry didn’t say anything as he gripped his quivering wand and focussed his power, his eyes stuck on the noose. Dark veins of power flickered through the beam of light and the scent of sulphur and burnt wood filled the air as the wood in Harry’s wand curdled and smoked. The beam of light suddenly darkened until it radiated with an unholy dark light, crimson veins of red and violet line shooting through it as the beam of dark fire shot forward at Nicodemus.

A wave of suffusing heat filled the air as the cone of dark light lanced at Nicodemus, but it was intercepted as the shadow form jumped forward and thrust out his crossed palms. The spell struck the shadow and was deflected, the sustained beam cracking apart into splinters of pure dark fire. Harry grunted as he felt the backlash, similar to a vicious jab to his head. The wand in his hand vibrated and Harry growled, claspng it with both hands and pushing the spell forward.

The shadow form took a step backwards but it kept its palms up, holding back the rush of dark fire with a concave disk of dark energy. Harry kept the spell flowing through his wand, his eyes glittering darkly as he pushed with all his strength, all his might, but it was for naught. The shadow met the blast of the spell and deflected it all. Dark fire rained down on the ground and around the walls, searing into stone one of the gleaming suits of armour. The armour shuddered and spluttered as a goblet of dark fire melted its thick metallic plate and collapsed to the ground in a heap. Heat filled the air; an oppressive heat that made even Harry sweat, but the shadow didn't seem to notice it.

Finally, Harry sighed and jerked his wand, collapsing the spell and taking a wary step backwards, staying out of the range of the shadow. The shadow seemed to recognise this and it hissed at him, pacing the hallway eagerly as Nicodemus drove Sanya back up towards Harry. Both of the sword-fighting men jumped over the small blazing puddles of dark fire and continued fighting as Harry took another step backwards, retreating back towards where Molly crouched over Amanda.

‘Okay, so we’ll go for the noose then,’ Harry thought, breathing deeply. He clasped his wand tightly, ignoring the heat that radiated from the runes and the wand. ‘At least we have a plan.’

‘Not a very detailed plan, but yes,’ Meciél thought but Harry frowned as a thought occurred to him.

‘Meciél, can Nicodemus feel pain, even when he’s immortal?’ Harry thought and he felt Meciél latching onto the formations of an idea in his mind.

‘Yes,’ Meciél answered. ‘However, he has learnt to block out most of the pain. It would take great trauma to incapacitate him.’

‘Oh, I have an idea,’ Harry thought and gave a cocky smile as he turned his eyes on the shadow. He placed his wand in his robe and

eyed Nicodemus and the shadow with glinting eyes. 'Let's see how this immortal bastard likes being crushed into a bloody smear.'

He took a step forward, closed his eyes and drew on Meciél's dark power, allowing it to wash over his body. Hatred, rage and an animalistic fury washed over his mind as the darker emotions slammed into his consciousness, almost making him lose control for a second. However, he was able to retain control over a small part of his conscious mind and allowed the demonic rage to surge through him. He didn't need his eyes open to know of the changes happening to his body, to know that two bony wings were bursting out of his back and that his legs and arms were thickening and lengthening. He didn't need to see to know that his skin was changing into a thick leathery hide and that his chest was bursting out with thick armoured plating. He didn't need his eyes to know that a thick armoured tail burst out of his lower back and that his head lengthening out into a snout.

In a span of a few seconds, Harry had changed from a five-foot fourteen year old boy into a seven-foot demonic bone wrym. He let out a loud bestial roar and continued to surge down the hallway, his footsteps causing the ground to shudder. His roaring fury caught the attention of everybody in the hall and both Sanya and Nicodemus turned to see what was happening. Even though Sanya had seen Harry in this form before and Nicodemus must have heard about it from Deirdre, when she had been alive, the two of them seem stunned. Harry roared again and charged at the Nicodemus' shadow form. It staggered backwards, writhing and boiling furiously as it raised a hand. Dark energy formed into a spherical ball, but Harry reached the shadow first and slammed into it with all of his force.

It was like slamming into an impenetrable force and Harry stumbled, pain flaring in his gigantic body. But the shadow howled and smashed apart, shattering into hundreds of different pieces of a dark liquid-like substance. Harry roared in triumph as the substance oozed across the ground towards Nicodemus at great speed, and he growled menacingly and turned to face Nicodemus. With a bounding step, Harry jumped forward and raised his arm. Sanya was smart enough to get out of the way and ducked to the side as Harry brought his armoured fist down on Nicodemus' face. The man's face snapped

back under the force of the blow, his neck instantly crushed, and the head hung at an extremely unnatural angle, flopping downwards. Before Nicodemus had a chance to fall to the ground, Harry spun around and brought his tail up in a loud sweeping movement, tearing through stone walls and slamming it into Nicodemus' chest. There was a loud snap, a loud crash, and Nicodemus was thrown towards the wall and into three gleaming suits of armour with great force.

Metal clashed against each other was Nicodemus collapsed, disappearing underneath a mixture of helms, shields, swords and plate-mail. There was no sign of Nicodemus, only glinting metal and a spray of dark blood that was already dissolving into a misty black gas. The broken remnants of the demonic shadow oozed along the ground, seeping into the cracks of the heap of metal and disappearing. Harry let out a triumphant bestial roar, rage and demonic pleasure flashing through his mind as he slammed his fists together. Distantly, in one corner of his mind, he noticed Sanya cautiously approaching the heap of metal.

Molly looked on, her blue eyes wet with tears as she looked on, her hands still pressed into Amanda's side as she tried to stem the blood flow. Whatever spell she had cast before must have either worn off or had become ineffective, and there was a deep look of horror and dread on her face. She quaked with fear at the presence of Harry's demonic form but the fate of her sister somehow gave her the courage to speak up.

"Please," She pleaded urgently, her voice tearful. "I-I need a healing spell...anything! Help me, Potter!"

Harry growled at her, his mind not comprehending her request, and Sanya turned around. Suddenly, just as the two of them were briefly distracted, an armoured helmet shot from the pile of metal and slammed into Sanya's head. The Knight gave a grunt and dropped his sword as he fell to the ground, limp and unmoving. The silver fire died on the blade as Nicodemus' shadow poured from the gaps of the fallen armour, boiling and thrashing madly. It had no human form now- it was simply a mass of shadow, and it shot towards Harry and slammed into him with great force.

Harry roared as the shadow struck him and staggered back by the force of the blow. There was a loud cracking noise as several of the armoured plates covering his chest shattered apart, and then the shadow seeped past his defences and into his chest. Harry roared in agony and thrashed with his wings and arms, trying to tear the shadow off him. An icy feeling was enveloping him- he was shrouded in old, bitter frost and he was drowning. He roared again, thrashing weakly as he dropped to his knees, his wings slicing through the shadow enveloping him and trying to tear it off him. The shadow stuck and distantly, Harry heard a cold, mocking laughter ring into his ears.

Suddenly there was a screeching female voice and an invisible column of wind struck at Harry and the shadow. The shadow boiled angrily and hissed as great forces wrenched much of it off Harry, sending it spiralling in a furious cyclone of wind. Molly strode forward, brandishing her blasting rod as she roared another incantation, and the earth shuddered and rumbled as a large thorny root burst from the ground and wrapped itself around the solid shadow. For a second, it loosed its grip and Harry roared as it sliced through it with his wings. He quickly concentrated, focussing back on his human side, and felt the changes come over him. In the few seconds it took him to transform back, the shadow had gripped one of the chest-pieces of the fallen armour and hurled it at Molly. Molly deflected it with a flash of blue light and parried it with her blasting rod but she was knocked back on the ground. It turned back to Harry just as he retained human form and he shoved his hands into his robes and gripped his wand.

“Aeris Estus!” He roared over the howling screech of the frenzied shadow. He gave a cry of pain as the shadow dived at him, shuddering in agony as it enveloped him, blocking out his vision and hearing. He could see nothing but blackness and all he could hear was a high-pitched hum and the steady throb of the shadow. He was being squeezed to death, icy was running through his body and dulling the bright flames of Hellfire. For a second, Harry felt fear race through him and he thrashed in panic. He couldn’t breathe, he was suffocating- and then, just as suddenly as the sensations had gripped him, they stopped as the shadow loosened its hold over him. It was screeching in pain as Harry’s last spell finally began to affect it and it left Harry’s fallen body, smouldering with oily black smoke.

Harry staggered up, his very being glowing in a soft red light. The air was shimmering around him, rippling with newly formed thermals and the floor beneath his feet began to blacken because of the aura of intense heat and magic surrounded him. Heat emanated from his body and Harry flicked his wand, sending a blast of hot air at the shadow. It screeched again and retreated once more, sliding back into the fallen metal heap. Harry was panting as he staggered forward, his wand raised. The only warning he had was when the armour shifted, just as it all burst outwards.

Harry had no time to shield himself, but the aura of heat and magic around him was enough to do the job as several pieces of metal struck him. There were dark crimson and black flashes of magic all around him as the shields, helmets and twisted piles of metal shattered and were sent careening away. The spell dissipated under the numerous blows and Harry levelled his wand forward as Nicodemus emerged.

His face was smashed in, his nose a mass of pulp, bone and blood and his cheekbones ripping through the flesh of his cheek. One of them had torn upwards into his left eye, but the other eye was burning with murder and insanity. The noose around his neck pulsed with unimaginable darkness, sending a chilling wave of icy coldness down the corridor. Nicodemus strode forward, his chest moving oddly as broken ribs and liquefied organs mashed together, but he still moved with a serpentine grace as he brought his sword up.

“Evertoxuro!” Harry roared and a jet of flames and smoke billowed out from his wand like a flamethrower. Nicodemus was instantly enveloped and Harry took a step backward, his left hand flying out as his sword flew from the ground.

An instant later, Nicodemus strode through the flames, ignoring the slight fact that he was on fire and his sword blurred. Harry snapped his wand arm back but gave a cry of pain and dropped the wand as Nicodemus’ slashed him across the forearm. He brought his sword up, clasping it with both hands and deflected the next blow, but staggered backwards as Nicodemus pressed the offensive. It was no contest.

Harry, with the rudimentary skills Meciél had given him, was barely able to block most attacks. He fell back, desperately trying to keep Nicodemus from killing as their swords clashed against each other. Harry had no chance to take the offensive and after seven seconds of duelling, Nicodemus twisted his sword and delivered a vicious slice on Harry's chest.

Harry gave a cry of pain and faltered in his defence, and Nicodemus' next slash was across his left arm. With a grunt, Harry dropped his sword and took a hurried step backwards as Nicodemus advanced. Fear shot through his veins, both his fear and Meciél's, and his eyes widened with shock and surprise as Nicodemus' lifted his sword and plunged it down. There was a silver blur in front of him and suddenly Sanya was standing there, blood dripping from a nasty gash on his head. His sword flashed with silver fire as he blocked Nicodemus' sword, his eyes grim.

Nicodemus faltered in surprise for just an instant and Harry quickly reached out with his hand, his will and magic calling both his sword and wand to his hand. His eyes were on the noose around Nicodemus' neck and for an instant, he had the perfect opportunity to remove Nicodemus' immortality. However, before his sword and wand could be called into his hand, there was a dark blur and suddenly the shadowy form of Nicodemus was back.

Harry gave a cry of surprise as the shadow raised its hand and punched Harry in the face once, twice and then three times. Harry staggered back with a wince and his sword and wand clattered to the ground in mid-flight. The shadow grinned and dissolved into a boiling and writhing mass of darkness that shot forward and slammed into Harry's face with great force. White flared in his eyes and pain flared in his head as Harry felt himself get thrown off his feet and onto the ground.

He lay there, barely conscious of the sounds of battle going on mere metres away from him. His head was throbbing with pain and dizziness and everywhere he looked, he could only see a dazed blur. He winced in pain and scrunched his eyes shut as a bright flare of light filled his vision. His hearing was not right and everything was distorted- there were random flashes of low and high pitches of noise

as Harry shook his head, gingerly reaching up. He could feel wetness around his nose and mouth and distantly wondered if his nose was bleeding.

‘Beloved! You must get up!’ Meciél whispered into his ear.

“Wha..?” Harry mumbled, his tongue swollen and burning with pain.

‘Beloved! Harry! Please, get up!’ Meciél begged softly and Harry felt illusionary arms on his face. But although Meciél was able to sooth some minor aches and pains, she was not able to drive away this injury and she gave a frustrated sigh. ‘Beloved! You must get up! You must keep fighting or you must run away! You must not let Nicodemus kill you! Do not lay here to die!’

“Okay, okay,” Harry mumbled softly and opened his eyes. He rolled over to his side and with all of his strength; he tried to push himself off the ground. Dizziness struck him and suddenly a wave of nausea rose up in his stomach.

With a loud gagging noise, Harry turned over and retched. The thick liquid that dripped from his mouth contained both the contents of his stomach and an intermingling patch of dark red blood and Harry shook his head dazedly. Meciél whispered into his ear and Harry felt her presence surround him, comforting and encouraging him, and he pushed up off the ground and staggered onto his feet. It was a struggle to maintain balance and distantly, as if he were in a dream, he could see Nicodemus pushing Sanya backwards, ignoring the silver fire that burnt his demonic shadow.

He lurched forward, his eyes on the target, and for the last few metres he staggered and jumped onto Nicodemus’ back. Nicodemus thrashed as Harry slipped an arm under his tan coat, trying to tug the noose off the older Denarians neck. He succeeded in tightening it and suddenly, as Nicodemus thrashed again, it rose up and tightened around his throat, suffocating him. As soon as this happened, Nicodemus went absolutely berserk.

Harry gave a cry of panic as Nicodemus spun around frantically and he tightened his grip on the noose, wrapping his legs around Nicodemus' back and holding on for his dear life. There was only a single purpose in his life at the moment, only one thing he could do, and Harry fixed himself on Nicodemus' back and pulled at the noose with all of his strength. Nicodemus brought his sword and Harry flinched, but suddenly Sanya was there and he knocked the sword from Nicodemus' flailing hands and pinned the arm against the wall.

Molly appeared on the other side, her face taut with rage as she pinned down the other hand with her blasting rod. Both Sanya and Molly strained to keep Nicodemus pinned down and the man howled; a horrible screeching noise that sent shivers down Harry's back. Suddenly a frenzied and panicked mass of shadow whipped and lashed out at all three of them. It recoiled from Sanya, as if his very presence caused it pain, and tried to strike at Molly, who lifted her blasting rod off Nicodemus' arm in a vain attempt to defend herself. She was thrown backwards and Sanya growled as he Nicodemus brought up his other arm and slammed him in the face. But he remained firm and took the punches with gritted teeth and Nicodemus howled in fury and fear again.

Harry squeezed his eyes shut and tightened his grip on the noose as the shadow tore at his back, slamming into him. Coldness filled his senses and a frost seemed too grown within him as the shadows delved into him, but Harry tried to block out all of the pain and drifted off into his own little world. In there, there was only grim determination and pure hatred and Harry basked in it as searing Hellfire roared into him. Along with it came Meciél and he embraced her presence. He was Meciél and Meciél was him and they both struggled with all of their power to keep their grip tight, to resist the shadow and to kill Nicodemus.

The struggle seemed to take an eternity but eventually Nicodemus' thrashes and flails grew weaker and weaker, until he finally stopped struggling. Nicodemus fell to the ground and Harry fell with him, but he kept his eyes shut and his grip tight as his head was pressed against the once-immortal man's chest. He didn't let himself rest an iota, even when the shadow departed and he was once again free of the icy cold sensations, until, at last, he heard the heart beneath him

stop beating. Nicodemus gave one last spasm and a gasp of air escaped his lungs before he died.

After a few moments, Harry let go of the noose and rolled over, panting loudly as he opened his eyes. Light flared in them and Harry winced, but he ignored the pain as he glanced to his side, at Nicodemus. The man's expression, even on his mutilated face, was one of terror and shock, as if he hadn't believed what was really happening to him. Purple stained the few parts of his cheeks that still remained intact and the noose was tight around his neck, the constant darkness that had throbbed around it gone.

Under Harry's gaze, the noose suddenly shuddered and blackened as it uncoiled itself, shrivelling up into it dissolved into dust and revealing a pale neck with oddly-patterned bruises. There was a soft tinkling noise as a small silver coin rolled from Nicodemus' body, somehow sounding extremely loud as it clattered to the ground. Suddenly a booted foot appeared in Harry's vision and somebody bent down to pick up the denarius coin with a white handkerchief. Harry looked up, suddenly feeling drained and tired as if all the rage and hatred had been taken from him, and saw Sanya carefully placing the coin in his robe. For a moment, Knight and Denarian eyed each other down with a new respect before Sanya met his look with a silent respectful nod.

The moment was broken when they heard a female cry and Sanya looked up, fear on his face as he raced out of Harry's vision. Harry groaned out loud and looked the other way, where Molly and Sanya were crouching over Amanda. Molly's hands were drenched in blood as she pressed them against her sister's side and as quickly as he could, Harry got on his hands and knees and crawled over. He collapsed by Amanda's side with a soft groan and stared at the injured girl blankly. Amanda was still alive, gasping weakly for breath. Her open eyes were wet with tears and her mouth moved silently as she violently shivered and for a moment, she met Harry's gaze with clarity, before her eyes glazed over.

"You have to do something," Molly said and it took Harry a moment to realise she was talking to him.

“I...I don’t know...any spell...to heal this...bad...wound,” Harry said tiredly, staring at Amanda. He was too tired and too hurt to feel anything other than apathy and he groaned and sank back to the floor.

“And you think I do?” Molly snapped, anger clouding her features. “Help her, goddammit! Do something! You’re a big bad-arse Denarian! Show us your fucking powers, for God’s sake, and save her life!”

Harry let out a low grow of irritation at Molly’s tone and a flicker of annoyance entered his mind. Still, he raised his hand and with great effort, he called his wand to him. When it flew into his palm, he closed his fist and sighed as warmth spread through him. He frowned, his mind racing as fast as he could as he tried to think of something, and then waved his wand, muttering a soft incantation as he levelled it at Amanda’s body. There was a white flash of light and Amanda abruptly relaxed as her eyes closed and she went limp, her head rolling to the side.

“What did you do?” Molly asked frantically as she reached down and checked for a pulse.

“I put her in a short coma,” Harry explained tiredly and winced as he sat up. “It will...lower her heart rate, hence, lower the rate of bleeding,...and keep her...autonomic functions stable. It’s the only thing I know. We need a properly-trained...”

Suddenly he was interrupted by shouts from down the hall. He looked up with tired eyes and was hardly surprised to see Dumbledore, McGonagall and Bagman racing down the corridor, the former reflecting an aura of invisible power and restrained anger and the latter looking shocked and surprised.

“What happened here?” Bagman asked, almost hysterically, but nobody answered him.

Dumbledore’s eyes flickered over Nicodemus’ corpse and surveyed the damage and carnage around them, assessing it in a single glance. Without uttering a word, he bent down to examine Amanda, flicking

his wand over her. There was a golden flash of light that seeped into Amanda's prone body and it was as if a sudden strain left her unconscious body, making her seem totally at ease. Dumbledore flicked his wand again and Amanda was suddenly floating down the corridor, McGonagall hurrying after her. Dumbledore stared after them for a moment and then turned to Harry, concern on his face.

"Harry?" Dumbledore asked softly, his concerned blue eyes probing Harry's.

"You have impeccable fucking timing," Harry said bluntly, tiredly, noting that Bagman was helping Molly stand up, the latter looking like she might burst into tears at any moment.

"What happened here?" Dumbledore asked softly.

"Nicodemus came, Nicodemus stabbed, Nicodemus was strangled to death with his own tool of immortality," Harry remarked unenthusiastically but gave a satisfied grin. "The irony is perfect."

His grin was replaced with a wince of pain as Dumbledore put a light hand on his back. When he withdrew it, it was covered in blood and Harry blinked in surprise.

"Oh," He said faintly. "That explains a lot of these aches then. I thought they were...um...sex-related...or..." he trailed off, blinking quickly and shaking his head, unable to present his usual witty self.

"Let me take you to the hospital wing," Dumbledore said gently and Harry was too tired to shrug Dumbledore off as the elder wizard helped Harry up off the ground, while Bagman and Sanya help a limping Molly down the corridor.

"Promise me you'll destroy my blood," Harry muttered, tired, weak but still wary enough to retain his survival skills. "Promise me. I don't...um...I don't want...Nicodemus...no, not him, because he's dead...um...anybody else..."

“I will, Harry,” Dumbledore promised quietly and flicked his wand over the corridor. Instantly, the pools of blood and other bodily fluids from the various participants of the fight disappeared and Harry sighed in relief.

He allowed his body to lean on Dumbledore’s as he hobbled down the corridor towards the hospital wing. Dumbledore led him there with a steady grip and Harry’s eyes glazed over, his mind seeking out Meciél’s presence.

In his mind, Meciél radiated a strong sense of approval and great affection and Harry basked in the feelings, allowing them to wash over his tired mind.

‘You did it, beloved,’ She whispered proudly. ‘You prevailed where three of my previous hosts have failed. Oh beloved, you have no idea how proud I am of you.’

Harry felt a flash of pride and triumph from her as her warming presence flooded his body, soothing what aches and pains she could, and he allowed Dumbledore to grip his arm as they turned a corner and walked away from the corridor, leaving Nicodemus’ mutilated and mangled body lying unceremoniously on the ground.

Harry barely remembered entering the hospital wing, stripping out of his bloodied clothes and lying down on one of the beds. He did recall Madame Pomfrey hovering over him with a wand, occasionally shoving vials of liquid into his mouth, and definitely remembered having his wounds healed and revelling in the absence of pain as a warm sensation flooded his body as he nestled under the covers of his bed.

Although he had been given a sleeping potion, Harry didn’t fall asleep but just lay there on the bed, wearied but content and free of pain. As he stared at the beautiful moon hovering over the lake, a wave of frost crept up the window and the curtains around his bed were pulled back. Maeve was then leaning over his face with an enticing smile on her enchanting face.

“You have fought hard tonight,” She whispered softly, her arm trailing down his chest. “Let me soothe the pains of your battle.”

Harry welcomed her mouth as she clamped her lips on hers and wrapped an arm around the Winter Lady as she climbed onto his bed and on top of him. As she slid the top of her dress off her chest, the last conscious thought he had was that Maeve didn't really seem as cold as he had expected

The day after the Yule Ball, the Great Hall was abuzz with mutters and babbles as students talked loudly with one another. The decorations had been taken down and the normal tables had been replaced. Students sat at their house tables, conversing with grand gestures as they speculated on what had happened last night. Nearly everybody had felt the shudders that had rocked through the castle last night and had seen Dumbledore practically running from the room, displaying an aura of power that they had never seen before.

From what most people had gathered, there had been a duel last night. It was common knowledge that both Harry Potter and Amanda Carpenter had been involved – although people differed in opinion as some thought Harry had tried to kill Amanda and others thought they had fought on the same side. It was also known that Professor Carpenter and the large Russian date had also been involved, although to what extent nobody knew. At the very moment, Harry Potter and Amanda Carpenter had been seen lying in the hospital wing by a pair of Fifth Years and the rumours were thriving

Some students were speculating that it was the work of Dark Wizards, or even Death Eaters, although people scoffed them down. No, it wasn't dark wizards; it was the students from Durmstrang who wanted to remove the competition. No, it was a pack of werewolves and they had ripped Potter apart. No, Amanda had tried to kill Potter in a fit of jealousy after she saw him talking to that other girl. No, it was Professor Carpenter who had tried to kill her own sister because she was jealous. No, it was Potter, who had tried to kill Professor Carpenter's date because he was jealous. No, Potter had shown his true colours as a dark wizard and had tried to destroy Hogwarts. No, another dragon had gone mad and went for Potter and Potter had defeated it.

And they were some of the saner ones.

Over at the Gryffindor table, Hermione sniffed as she heard Lavender Brown retelling her most favourite rumour to an attentive audience, who ooh'ed and aah'ed at the right places.

“And then Amanda went totally mad with jealousy when she saw Harry talking to me,” She was saying, a beaming smile on her face.

“And she stormed out of the room. Harry, who’s such a bad boy, wanted to ignore her but I said that he should go after her, because she was probably feeling sad and everything. Harry agreed with me, of course, and went after her and then she attacked him! It was totally unprovoked and everything!”

Hermione shook her head in disgust and turned away, stabbing her fork down on her plate with more force than necessary. From across the table, Ron and Neville shared quick looks.

“Are you alright?” Neville asked hesitantly.

“No, I’m not alright,” Hermione said in annoyance, a scowl on her face. “Amanda is in the hospital wing, Potter with her, and nobody really knows what happened. I’m tired of listening to all of these rumours.”

“Cheer up, Hermione,” Ron said in an attempt to comfort her. “I’m sure if it was serious, Dumbledore would have told us. Amanda’s probably fine. Maybe she tripped over or something.”

“Well, have you seen him today?” Hermione asked him and Ron frowned.

“What do you think happened?” He asked curiously.

“We know that Amanda left and that Potter went after her,” Hermione said and gave Ron and Neville a meaningful glance. “And we know that Potter is, well, he’s not very nice to her.”

“You think he did it to her?” Ron asked incredulously and he glanced around furtively and lowered his voice. “Hermione, the guys a git to everybody but she seems to cop it a lot less than anybody else.”

“Didn’t you once think that Potter was abusive towards Amanda?” Neville asked quietly. “And didn’t Amanda tell you that he wasn’t?”

“If he was really hurting her, do you think she would tell us?” Hermione scoffed. “I’ve read that women are abused by their boyfriends or husbands don’t tell anybody because they’re ashamed of themselves. Or worse off, they still love their partner and don’t want to get them in trouble.”

“Hermione,” Ron started, glancing past her shoulder, but Hermione missed that moment and turned on him in annoyance.

“It’s possible,” Hermione protested hotly and glared at Ron. “Honestly Ron, do you always have to criticize...”

“Hermione,” Neville interrupted softly and pointed past her.

Hermione frowned and the Great Hall became silent as two figures walked through the doors. Hermione gasped as she saw Molly walked forward with a wearied expression on her face. Beside her, Sanya supported her elbow with, although it was clearly unnecessary. He glanced around the room with strong and tired eyes and together, the pair walked past the whispering students and sat themselves down at the table.

A few moments later, Dumbledore strode into the Great Hall. However, his eyes were not twinkling and there was an expression on his face that made a few of the remaining students at Hogwarts shift uncomfortably in their seats. The last time Dumbledore had worn this expression had involved a lot of cold, hard words on the Headmaster’s part towards the Minister of magic and an incredible display of magic on his part as he single-handedly banished the Dementors from Hogwarts.

The Headmaster strode up to the Head table and turned to look out over the crowd of students.

“My dear students,” He begun quietly, but his voice resounded through the hall and silenced everybody. “Last night, a serious incident took place that has left two of our number in the Hospital Wing. The matter was meant to be kept discrete, so naturally, I assume that many of you already know what has happened. However,

for the unfortunate few who lack the necessary gossipy nature, I will briefly explain what has occurred.”

“Last night there was an incident. An individual, who will not be named here, attempted and was almost successful in assassinating Harry Potter, Amanda Carpenter, Professor Carpenter and our new guest to Hogwarts, Mr Sanya Boshvek.”

A loud wave of mutters and buzzing arose, students turning to one another and whispering in surprise, shock and puzzlement. However, Dumbledore raised his hands and the hall fell silent underneath his serious blue eyes.

“After careful consultation with the Ministry, it was decided that you should not be told. However, I feel that you deserve to know the facts behind the matter at hand, and that Mr Potter and Ms Carpenter deserve to be represented fairly in the rather magnificent stories that I have been hearing.”

“For some time now, there has been a madman trying and failing to murder the entire Carpenter family, including Fourth Year Gryffindor Amanda Carpenter and Professor Carpenter here. They have been largely unsuccessful due to the intervention of Harry Potter. As a close friend of the family, Mr Potter had previously foiled three attempts by this madman.”

“However, last night the assassin gained entry into Hogwarts and confronted Ms Carpenter. Due to the intervention of Harry Potter, Professor Carpenter and Mister Boshvek, the assassin was only successful in wounding Ms Carpenter. During the confrontation, the assassin fought most viciously and all three were injured. However, thanks to the courage and determination of Mr Potter, the assassin was defeated and Ms Carpenter’s life was saved.”

“Let me assure you that Hogwarts remains safe,” He said firmly and Ron shivered, hearing the power in the old man’s voice. “There are measures being placed up as we speak that will prohibit such an occurrence from happening again. The assassin has been defeated

and there is unlikely to be another attack, however, I ask that you report anything you deem as suspicious to your nearest Professor.”

Dumbledore stopped and looked as if he were about to sit down, before he a twinkle came into his eyes and once more he stood tall above the inhabitants of the Great Hall.

“Oh, and I must ask the more curiously-inclined students to please show some restraint in the presence of Mr Potter, Ms Carpenter and Professor Carpenter. Please do not bother them about this incident. It is a private matter that will disclosed at a time and a place of their choosing. On a final note, I bid that you all have an absolutely wonderful breakfast and I suggest that you try the honey- it was freshly squeezed this morning.”

He stepped down to murmurs and by the time Dumbledore was sitting in his seat and taking a small sip of his teacup, the entire hall was alive with talking. Some of the students, especially some of the younger ones, looked to be in awe of what they had just heard while the older ones were frowning speculatively. Over at the Gryffindor table, Hermione had a contemplative expression on her face while Ron looked stunned.

“Blimey!” Ron exclaimed breathlessly and exchanged a wild glance at Neville, who looked just as stunned as his red-haired companion.

“Somebody tried to kill Amanda?” Neville asked in shock. “And they were stopped by Harry Potter, no less.”

“I know,” Ron whistled softly, shaking his head. “Sure, he’s famous and all that but he is a bit of a git.”

“Three times,” Neville said in awe. “He stopped them three times.”

“Maybe that’s why Amanda likes him,” Ron said, narrowing his eyes in speculation. He shot a glance at Hermione but the bushy-haired girl ignored him and frowned down into her porridge. “It would explain why Amanda always kept insisting he was a good person, and whys she hangs out with him.”

Neville nodded in agreement and the two boys sat next to each other, silently contemplating what they had just heard. After a few moments, Ron let out an explosive sigh and shook his head in bewilderment and awe.

“Blimey,” He muttered again.

“What do you think Dumbledore mean by ‘defeated’?” Neville muttered to Ron, a puzzled frown on his face.

“He means that the assassin is dead.” Hermione said for the first time, her voice sombre.

Neville twitched and Ron frowned, his eyes widening.

“Dead,” He murmured. “And Potter probably killed them.”

“Well, we know he’s got some power behind him,” Neville said reasonably. “I mean, look at the dragon.”

“Well, it’s not like this guy didn’t deserve it,” Ron said reasonable and shot a mischievous look at Hermione. “See Hermione, it look’s like he’s not a bad person after all.”

“I never said he was a bad person,” Hermione defended herself indigently. She flushed under Ron and Neville’s disbelieving stares and but held her ground. “I called him rude, arrogant, childish, immature, and an oversized bully who feels the need to make everybody around him miserable, but I didn’t say he was a bad person.

Ron and Neville exchange glances and Hermione sighed, dropping her spoon onto her plate with a loud clang.

“Okay, so maybe I did call him a bad person,” she muttered grouchy. “But it was all true.”

“Still think he’s bad,” Ron asked her with a grin. “It sounds like he saved Amanda’s life, and she is your friend. That’s gotta count for something.”

“Nasty people can still occasionally do good thing,” Hermione sniffed haughtily. “But it doesn’t make them any less nasty than they were before. I won’t be at all surprised if Potter hasn’t changed his attitude one bit after this. In fact, it will probably make him even more arrogant.”

“As much as I hate to say it I think he must be a bit of a hero,” Ron said and frowned. “I mean, he fought assassins to save his best friends life. There aren’t too many people who would do that.”

“Amanda is hardly Potter’s best friend,” Hermione disagreed.

“Well, who else would be?” Neville asked quietly.

Hermione blinked and opened her mouth, before closing it with an audible snap.

“Well, okay,” she conceded. “Amanda may be Potter’s best friend, but that still doesn’t mean that Potter is Amanda’s best friend.”

“Um...what?” Ron asked, scratching his head, but he was ignored as Hermione went back to her porridge with a thoughtful scowl on her face.

He glanced over at Neville and shrugged helplessly. Neville met his gaze and they both shook their heads in unison, turning back to their own food. The Great Hall was still in a bit of an uproar as Ron heartily dug into his food. He noticed Neville’s pensive frown and nudged him with his elbow, a questioning look on his face.

“I wonder what Potter is doing right now?” Neville asked with a contemplative frown and his lips twitched at Hermione’s audible sniff at the mention of her nemesis.

“I dunno,” said Ron, a sly smile on his face as he glanced at Hermione, who was staring at him with narrowed eyes. “Probably something really heroic though.”

“Yeah,” Neville agreed, nodding amiably. “He’s probably figuring out a way to save the world or something.”

“If I can get this right, I’ve got it,” Harry murmured softly. Although Meciél gave a mental throb of encouragement, she remained otherwise silent as she allowed Harry to complete his complicated and important task.

Slowly and with a frown of careful concentration on his face, Harry balanced the object in his hand and slowly reached up towards his bedside table and placed the nine of diamonds on the very top of the card pyramid. He let out a rattling breath as the card wobbled but remained steady and brought his hand down. When the castle didn’t collapse, Harry let out a wild whoop of triumph and threw out his arms in a grand gesture of victory.

“I am the best!” He crowed happily, but his smile faded when the castle wobbled unsteadily and suddenly exploded in a small puff of smoke, sending cards scattering everywhere along the bed and ground.

He blinked and lowered his arms in disbelief, ignoring Meciél’s tinkling laughter in his ears as he stared at the cards with wide eyes.

‘It appears that your cards were sabotaged, beloved,’ Meciél said wryly. ‘Your enemy is most cunning and sly.’

“Oh, shut up,” Harry muttered crossly. Hellfire flared briefly in his mind and Harry snapped his fingers. The fallen cards all hissed as they blacked, their corners curling up in the heat before they dissolved into ash.

“Who the hell puts booby traps on a deck of cards anyway?” He muttered to himself and sighed loudly, flopping back on his bed and looking out the window.

Angry grey clouds covered the sky, sending down torrents of rain and snow. A loud wind whipped up, howling mournfully against the castle. Harry unconsciously nestled down in his blankets and gave a small yawn. Madame Pomfrey had once again show how advanced magical medicine was and all of his wounds from the fight last night had been healed. In a way, Harry supposed he was lucky that he only received physical trauma. He didn't know if Pomfrey would have been able to heal him if he had been hit by one of Nicodemus' spells.

At the moment, Harry was feeling particularly well. He had no aches and no bruises, the slash across his chest and arm had vanished and he was feeling especially good after last night. His mind flashed with tantalising images of Maeve and a cocky grin came across his face. Within his mind, Meciél gave an exasperated sigh. Harry rolled his eyes and gave Meciél the mental equivalent of poking his tongue out while reaching out to his bedside table.

On it was a small pile of sweets and presents from people apparently concerned with his health. A lot of them were from the younger years, especially the First and Second years. Judging by the notes that they had left, Harry got the wind that Dumbledore had explained a version of the events from last night to the school and many apparently thought that he was some kind of hero. Harry snorted at the thought and opened up a bar of chocolate, snapping some off and popping it into his mouth.

‘Perhaps I should become a hero, just for the perks,’ He mused silently. ‘Put aside my evil and sacrilegious and blasphemous ways and promise to do only good.’

‘Just eat your chocolate and put those silly thoughts of our mind,’ Meciél responded in amusement.

‘Oh, it's ‘our mind’, is it?’ Harry thought, a small smile curving his lips.

‘Yes, beloved, our mind,’ Meciél responded, stressing the last two words carefully. Harry could feel her amusement within his mind and

a full-brown grin crossed his face as he took another bite of his chocolate.

“So, when did my mind become our mind?” Harry murmured softly. There wasn’t a single sound, just a flicker of movement out of the corner of his eye and when Harry turned around, he saw Meciél sitting by his bed.

“When you decided to accept me,” Meciél responded smoothly and Harry’s smug face vanished as he pondered that fact.

“Well, okay then,” Harry relented. “But it’s still my mind; I’m just renting you out a part of my temporal lobe,

“It takes a very confused man to become a landlord to his own brain,” Meciél said and idly ran her hands over the small pile of sweets on Harry’s table.

“Well, it’s built for more than one, you know,” Harry retorted and frowned in thought. “Hmm, I wonder if I should shop around for some roommates. I mean, you must get bored up in there.”

“Quite the contrary,” Meciél responded quietly and a smile appeared on her beautiful face. “Your curiosity about sex and your love of violence is quite entertaining.”

“I entertain you?” Harry asked and smiled cockily as Meciél inclined her head. “Cool.”

“Yes, beloved, you do entertain me,” Meciél said and paused, a mischievous grin playing on her lips. “Much like a toddler entertains his parents when he attempts to speak using a grown-up voice.”

Harry halted in his movements, a piece of chocolate limp in his hands as mulled over the words. A frown came over his face and he turned back to Meciél.

“Did you just insult me?” He asked with narrowed eyes. “It sounded like an insult to me.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” Meciél murmured and glanced away, her silver eyes glittering with amusement.

“Hey,” Somebody else broke into the conversation with a yawn, and Harry blinked in surprise.

Meciél’s illusion vanished and Harry looked past where she had been sitting to see Amanda stirring in the bed next to him. She was blinking with tiredness and she yawned, a sleepy smile on her face as she looked at Harry. Suddenly her smile faltered, horror rushing into her eyes and she sat up in alarm, panic on her face.

“That man! With the sword! What happened? Is Molly alright? Are you alright? Where am I? What...” She rattled off quickly, her eyes wide with panic.

“Hey!” Harry interrupted loudly, a scowl on his face. Amanda stopped, breathing rapidly as she stared at him. “Shut. Up.” He finished in a slow and clear tone and Amanda blushed and fell silent as Harry continued.

“Now, listen to me, because I’m only answering this one,” Harry said and raised a hand to forestall her next words. “Number one- That man was Nicodemus. Number two- yes, he had a sword. He stabbed you with it, in fact. He stabbed me with it as well. It looks like we finally have something in common.”

Despite her earlier panic, Amanda managed to roll her eyes. She opened her mouth to speak but Harry continued on.

“Number three- What happened was you ran off like a total moron and got yourself stabbed, and like always, I had to save your pathetic life...again,” Harry said with an annoyed scowl and Amanda flushed with embarrassment and glanced away. “Number Four- Apart from suffering from her usual stupidity and self-righteousness, your sister, I think, is fine. I don’t know and I really don’t care. Number five- I will live. Killing Nicodemus took a little bit of effort, so I’m just in here to get the nurse to look at my sprained wrist. Number Six- Here is the

hospital wing. Number seven- Speak slowly or shut that noise-maker of yours."

Harry glanced over at the blonde girl lying in the bed next to him to find her with her mouth open, hope glimmered in her eyes as she stared at him.

"He's...he's dead?" She asked in a quivering voice, hope sprayed on her face. "He's really dead?"

"Dead as a...thing that's really, really...um...dead," Harry confirmed lamely and frowned. "Damn, I'm losing my touch. How about I change it to 'Dead as an 'Insert a really outstanding analogy right here'? Does that work?"

"And my family is safe now?" Amanda asked hopefully, ignoring Harry's remarks.

"Provided that he didn't track them down and kill them before coming after you, sure, I guess so," Harry answered and shrugged carelessly. "I don't think any of the other Denarians will try to kill you now. It's not worth the effort, really."

"You did this," Amanda breathed and stared at Harry with something he saw in a few of the First Year faces, the ones who thought he was 'cool' and a 'hero', and he sighed, rolling his eyes.

"Yes," he answered and looked away, turning back to his chocolate. "It's been a good year so far. I've killed a Drakon, and now Nicodemus. It's going to make me seem so much more powerful than I really am; which is good in its own way..."

He fell silent as a blur of colour threw itself at him and the next thing he knew, there was a pair of warm arms around him as Amanda leapt from her bed and clutched him tightly. Harry stiffened and with one arm, clasped Amanda's wrist and wrenched it from his arm but she just grabbed it again, so he sighed, rolled his eyes and stared at the wall. He could faintly hear the girl sobbing with relief and for the first

time in his life he was happy to see a Knight of the Cross as Sanya walk into the hospital wing.

The Knight seemed to be in a good mood and merely smiled when he turned his eyes on the hugging pair. Behind Amanda's back, Harry frantically motioned to the emotional girl that was clutching on to him.

"Get it off me!" He whispered loudly, an annoyed scowl on his face. Sanya merely shook his head with amusement and cleared his throat. Amanda withdrew from Harry and looked up with teary eyes, hope glimmering in them.

"Uncle Sanya! She shrieked and a beaming smile came over her face as she vaulted from Harry's bed and leapt for the man's arms.

Harry really wasn't paying attention as Sanya and Amanda hugged, ignoring Molly and Dumbledore walking into the hospital wing as he looked down at this hospital gown with a horrified expression. There was a wet patch of drool and tears on his shoulder and he gave a loud groan of disgust.

"That is disgusting," he muttered and tried to wipe it away with the bed sheet.

"Denarian," Molly started, before she visibly shook herself. "No, Harry. Thank you, for everything."

"Hey, don't think I did that for you," Harry said with a frown. He gestured to himself. "This was all for me. You were just in the right place and the right time."

Molly was unperturbed and moved forward to give him a hug. Once again, Harry stiffened as a pair of arms surrounded him and clutched him tight. He growled under his breath, both at Molly and at Meciél, who he could hear laughing in amusement within his mind. The growl must have been loud enough for Molly to hear because she hastily broke it off and stepped backwards.

Sanya stepped forward and Harry quickly put a hand up, his face deadly serious.

“If you hug me, I will kill you,” he promised quietly, but Sanya merely smiled and stood still. Harry popped another piece of chocolate in his mouth and glanced over at the Russian.

“So, Knight,” He said with a cocky smile on his face. “How does it feel to have one of your accursed enemies defeat the biggest menace your Knights have ever faced, not on his third go, not on his second go, but on his first go, while you lot had about a hundred shots and failed every single time?”

“It feels good,” Sanya remarked, taking a few moments to give it some thought. Harry blinked. “This was one competition that I am glad we lost. On behalf of the Church and the Knights, I thank you.”

Harry stared at the Knight with disbelief and then sighed, rolling his eyes and folding his arms petulantly.

“Killjoys,” He muttered. “I saved all of your arses. You could at least let me have a little fun.”

Amanda giggled at him and Harry shot her an irritated glare. However, his expression faded into that of neutrality as Dumbledore stepped forward, a twinkle in his eye as he stared down at the young Denarian.

“May we talk in private, Harry?” He asked warmly.

Harry put up thoughtful frown up on his face.

“Ah...no,” he answered, a mocking warmth in his voice as he matched Dumbledore’s tone.

“I must insist,” Dumbledore said and before Harry could say anything, Dumbledore had stepped forward and closed the curtains behind him. Harry felt a tingle of magic envelop the area around his bed and knew that it must be some kind of anti-eavesdropping ward.

He watched Dumbledore carefully as the old man took a seat next to Harry, glancing over at the bedside table filled with gifts. His eyes twinkled and he glanced back at Harry.

“I see your admirers have been busy,” Dumbledore remarked pleasantly.

“Well, if the idiots are willing to spend money to buy me stuff then I’m not going to stop them,” Harry remarked and popped another piece of chocolate in his mouth.

“Harry, I understand that you have been through a terrible ordeal,” Dumbledore started and Harry watched him with lazy eyes as he leaned back in his bed. “But I need to know the details...”

“Ask the Knight,” Harry interrupted. He blinked, and gave a loud burp, before continuing. “He was there for the fight, he can tell you what happened.”

“I have already conferred with Mr Boshvek and Professor Carpenter,” Dumbledore answered. “But you are mistaken. I wish to inquire about...”

“Who the hell is Boshvek?” Harry asked with a confused frown, and then cocked his head. “Wait. It sounds Russian...Sanya, right?”

Dumbledore nodded.

“As I was saying, Mr Boshvek and Professor Carpenter have already explained the necessary details, and I have submitted to the Ministry a basic outline of what has happened here,” Dumbledore began, but Harry once again interrupted him.

“Wait, the Ministry know?” He exclaimed and sat up, his eyes narrowing at the Headmaster. “Just what do they know?”

“They know that somebody tried to kill Ms Carpenter,” Dumbledore began carefully, steeping his fingers together.

“Amanda or Molly?” Harry interrupted.

“Amanda,” Dumbledore explained and Harry could have sworn he saw a glimmer of frustration in the older man’s eyes. He grinned and gestured for him to continue. “As I was saying, they know that Ms Carpenter- Amanda- was wounded and that you, Professor Carpenter and Mr Boshvek jumped in at her defence and that the assassin was killed in the fight that ensued.”

“They’re happy with that?” Harry asked sceptically.

“Not as such,” Dumbledore answered. “However, I was able to stall the Department of Magical Law Enforcement and have taken responsibility and control over the investigation of the incident.”

“You know, I have to compliment you on the seemingly unlimited amount of political power you have,” Harry said softly. “I suppose this is what Meciél wanted me to achieve when she asked me to dabble in politics.”

“It is not power, Harry,” Dumbledore began carefully and his eyes twinkled. “Rather, I have just the right amount of friends in just the right amount of places. As for the others, they respect my wisdom and are willing to leave such mundane matters to me. Besides, Hogwarts is and always has been the sole responsibility of the Headmaster. I possess certain duties, rights and responsibilities that allow me to have quite a bit of sway over the coming and goings of this castle.”

“So, you have political power,” Harry summarised after a few moments. He rolled his eyes. “That’s what I said, Dumbledore. Anyway, before you ask your questions, I have a few of my own. Like, how the hell did Nicodemus get into a warded castle?”

“The wards, Harry, are not an impenetrable set of barriers that physically keep a person away,” Dumbledore said after a moment’s pause. “That would be problematic given that Hogwarts is a school. Rather, the wards are designed to detect, alert and help banished hostile parties away from Hogwarts. The Yule Ball, however, required

a number of important Ministry Officials and other parties to visit Hogwarts, as well as the Durmstrang and Beauxbatons students. As such, not all of these parties have the best intentions of Hogwarts and her students in mind and it would have been terrible embarrassing if the wards banished them away. Why, I remember back in my time when a drunken wizard lurched from Hogsemade and received a full banishment. He spent the rest of his life thinking he was a tree.”

“You had to lower the wards,” Harry concluded quietly. “Or at least, you had to weaken them.”

“You are very astute, Harry,” Dumbledore said quietly. “Yes, I had to weaken the wards quite considerable, just to be safe. I did enact other security measures, but Nicodemus managed to disable them and slip in past the wards. I am still unclear of the exact details and I suspect that this Denarian had quite a bit of power behind him. With the presence of so many people and the presentation of the Yule Ball, I admit I was quite distracted and I did not expect a confrontation at the time. It took me a few moments to realise that something was wrong and a few more moments to pinpoint the exact location of the trouble. However, when I arrived, it seemed as if you had already defeated the threat.”

“Killed, Dumbledore,” Harry said wryly. “I killed the threat, and it was most satisfying.”

“I can imagine why,” Dumbledore said, almost sadly.

“Hmm,” Harry murmured. “So, you’re saying that it’s your fault that Nicodemus slipped into Hogwarts?”

“I will not be so arrogant as to lay all the blame in me,” Dumbledore said and the twinkle in his eye faded. A flash of anger washed across his face and Harry blinked, edging away from the older wizard. “During my investigation, I noticed that many of my security measures had been disabled from within. I am almost certain that somebody allowed him to enter.”

“A traitor,” Harry muttered and Dumbledore nodded. “Well, somebody entered me into this tournament and they had to have been at Hogwarts. Maybe they got orders or something or Nicodemus offered them something to let him in?”

“It is possible,” Dumbledore nodded. “It is quite possible that Nicodemus wouldn’t have even bothered you had you not confronted him.”

“He did give me a chance to walk away,” Harry said and frowned. “But Meciél said he was just bullshitting me. Hey, maybe he was serious.”

“It is quite possible,” Dumbledore said and stroked his long beard thoughtfully. “You seem to be involved in the matters of two plots. The first sees you entered into the tournament against your will for reasons unknown. The second sees hostile parties trying to murder the Knights of the Cross and their families.”

“Three plots,” Harry broke in. “The Drakon, remember?”

“No, Harry,” Dumbledore disagreed. “I am fairly certain that that was the work of those involved in the second plot. They saw you as an obstacle that continually got in the way of seeing the Knights and the Carpenters dead.”

“Hmm,” Harry frowned thoughtfully. For a few moments, the two wizards sat in silence, both deep in thought.

“The real question is, though,” Dumbledore began and Harry nodded, already knowing what the Headmaster was going to say.

“Are the plots connected or separated?” Harry finished and scratched his head. His emerald eyes glazed over for a second and Meciél whispered into his mind. “Meciél says that if they are truly connected, then whoever behind this needs the Knights dead more than they need me alive.”

“I concur,” Dumbleodre said pensively. “I was just thinking the same thing.”

“Well, you and Meciél are more alike than you know,” Harry said and Dumbledore blinked. Harry sighed. “That was a compliment, you know.”

“Indeed,” Dumbledore said and the twinkle emerged back in his eyes. “Meciél enjoys woolly socks as well?”

“Whatever,” Harry scoffed but his heart wasn’t into it. He frowned pensively again but then shook his head and gave a loud yawn. “I’ll worry about all of this later. I’m in a good mood, you know. It was a good night-good food, good fight, good revenge, and a great reward.”

“Ah yes, your tryst with the Winter Lady,” Dumbledore murmured and Harry started. “Which brings me back to my original question; although I believe that I already know the answer. I wished to know why Maeve was here for you last night. I suspect that it was your bargain, no?”

“You know of that, how?” Harry asked him with surprise in his eyes.

“There is very little that goes on in my school that I am not made privy to, Harry,” Dumbledore said and smiled mysteriously.

“Aha!” Harry declared and furiously pointed a finger at Dumbledore, satisfaction on his face. “Pervert! I always knew, Dumbledore, I always knew.”

“Not as such,” Dumbledore said in amusement, his eyes twinkling. “Maeve made an arrangement with Fawkes. How else did she gain access to this school? Her power was limited here which I suspect may be the reason why she did not come to your aid.”

“No, she probably didn’t want to ruffle her hair, or get a scratch,” Harry disagreed and Dumbledore blinked. Harry saw this and sighed.

“Contrary to what both you and Mieciel think, I am not a moron. I know just what Maeve is and what she’s like.”

“Will that be the last I see of her?” Dumbledore asked carefully and Harry stared the old man in the eyes, biting his lip in thought.

“It should be,” Harry answered honestly. “Believe me; I have no intention of making any more bargains with her.”

Dumbledore nodded and stood up, preparing to draw back the curtains.

“Wait!” Harry snapped quickly and Dumbledore turned back to him with curiosity on his face. “Before you go, where’s...”

“Your wand, Harry,” Dumbledore interrupted with a smile beneath his beard. “Is beneath your bed, along with the rest of your clothes and weapons.”

Harry looked satisfied as Dumbledore drew back the curtains and stepped out. Sanya and Molly were talking quietly to an exuberant Amanda but both looked up as Dumbledore walked out.

“Good day Harry,” Dumbledore said, and his eyes twinkled. “You shall be out tomorrow. In the mean time, I suggest you find something to amuse yourself with. However, I do not recommend that you try to build a card castle using a deck of exploding snap cards.”

“What?” Harry muttered but Dumbledore had already swept from the room. A few moments later, Molly and Sanya said their goodbyes and walked out, leaving Harry and Amanda alone in the room.

There was a tense silence for a few moments as Harry idly played with a loose thread on his blanket and Amanda bit her lip in indecision. Finally, it seemed as if the blonde had reached a decision and spoke up.

“Harry?” She asked hesitantly. “Who was that girl?”

“What?” Harry asked in annoyance, looking up from his blanket and staring at Amanda.

“That girl that you were talking to at the Yule Ball,” Amanda said and took a deep breath, apparently steeling herself. “Who was she?”

“That was Maeve,” Harry answered distractedly as he reached for another block of chocolate. Amanda blinked at his answer and her mouth fell open in surprise.

“As in...the faery Maeve?” She asked slowly. “The one you made a bargain with at the First Task?”

“Yeah,” Harry answered. “We had some...business to discuss.”

Amanda made a noise of understanding in the back of her throat, while Harry felt unconscious burning to his cheeks as memories of the business they had conducted filled his mind. He hid his blush by turning away, immersing himself in the removal of the chocolate bar wrapper, and when he turned back, it was gone.

“Why the hell do you care anyway?” He asked, biting into the bar of chocolate.

“Oh, no reason,” Amanda said with a small smile, looking satisfied. “I was just wondering.”

Harry grunted in acknowledgment, eating his chocolate bar, and Amanda fell silent once more.

“So, Amanda started after a few minutes, but Harry cut her off before she had even begun.

“Listen, we’re in this room until tomorrow and frankly, if you talk the entire time I will be forced to do something drastic, like pulling your tongue out or cutting off my own ears,” He said and reached over to his bedside table. He picked up a chocolate bar and threw it at Amanda, who caught it with surprise on her face. “Shove that in your mouth and don’t talk, alright?”

“Wow,” Amanda muttered sarcastically as she unwrapped the chocolate bar. “You really know how to make a girl feel special.”

“Oh, shut up,” Harry ordered, rolling his eyes.

“Make me,” Amanda retorted, a smile on her face.

“You do not want me to make you, believe me,” Harry threatened and Amanda giggled, popping a piece of chocolate in her mouth with a challenging look on her face. Harry groaned and turned away, shaking his head in disgust.

“This is going to be a long day,” He muttered to himself.

It was now a week after the Yule Ball and the beginning of a New Year. The incident with the mysterious assassin was still on everybody's minds and Hermione could quite frankly say that she was getting sick to death of Harry Potter. Although Amanda had only been let out of the Hospital Wing today, Potter had been let out a few days ago and had was now even more arrogant and condescending than he had been before. It had only been two days since he had come back and he had already taken to bossing everybody around and generally causing grief. If Hermione had to see that arrogant little smile on Potter's face one more time, she didn't know she would be able to restrain herself.

"Hermione?" Somebody broke into her thoughts and Hermione started. There was a soft giggle as Amanda waved her hand in front of Hermione's face, causing the bushy-haired girl to turn her head towards her. "I was the one in the hospital wing, you know. I'm the one who should be dazed, not you."

"Sorry," Hermione apologised. "I was just thinking."

"You were scowling, that's what you were just doing," Amanda said with a smile on her face. A quiet buzz of chatter lifted up from around them as students took the last chance they could to laze around before their first class. "Thinking bad thoughts?"

"Something like that," Hermione admitted and bit her lip, staring at her friend carefully. Although Hermione was more than ecstatic to see Amanda up and well, she had to admit that her American friend had a soft-spot for Potter that annoyed her to no-end. "Can you answer me honestly and tell me what you think of Potter?"

"Harry?" Amanda asked, blinking in surprise. "Oh, he's alright."

"You haven't been here for the last few days," Hermione muttered in a disgruntled tone. "He's been bossing everybody around like he owns the place."

Amanda merely looked amused and shook her head in resignation.

“Doesn’t he usually do that?” She asked Hermione.

“Well, yeah,” Hermione admitted. She gave a small huff and folded her arms, blowing a strand of bushy hair away from her eyes. “But after saving your life and almost dieing, I thought that maybe he would have a look at who he is and change.”

“He did,” Amanda said and rolled her eyes, a reluctant grin tugging at her lips. “He's convinced he's better than ever.”

“Tell me about it,” Hermione said furiously. Her voice rose and her cheeks reddened as she continued, getting into the flow of the argument. “He's so arrogant and heartless. He almost bit the head off a couple of Seventh Years who had taken his favourite chair the other day, and I caught him signing autographs for the First Years just this morning. He wasn't even using his real name, just a scribble that looked vaguely like a signature!”

“Well, that's Harry,” Amanda said, shrugging carelessly. She idly ran her hands through her hair as she glanced around the common room, searching for the subject of her conversation.

“The older years don’t like him at all, but the younger years, especially the first years, well,” Hermione said with a scowl, shaking her head. “They idolise him. Some of them even try to copy him. Thankfully, I put a stop to it before they had even begun. We’ve got enough problems with just one of Potter.”

Amanda gave a soft giggle, a smile playing on her face, and Hermione scowled, clearly upset that Amanda wasn’t sympathising with her.

“Why do you always make excuses for him?” She demanded in annoyance.

“I'm sorry?” Amanda said, blinking in surprise at Hermione’s hostile tone.

“You,” Hermione said with a scowl, jabbing her finger at Amanda. “You're always making excuses for him.”

“What?” Amanda asked, still bewildered at the turn of the conversation.

“He treats you like garbage, he treats everybody like garbage,” Hermione said with an annoyed frown. “He struts around the school like he runs it. He disrespects the Professors and insults Professor Dumbledore right to his face and you; you still make excuses for him.”

“He's annoying and irritable,” Amanda said slowly, eying Hermione with concern. “He's not a bad person.”

“Wow,” Hermione muttered sarcastically. “I would hate to see your definition of a bad person if you think Potter isn't one”

“He saved my life! He saved my families life!” Amanda exclaimed, a glimmer of anger appearing on her face. “He didn't have to, he had all reasons not to, but he did. What more do you want?”

“That's a point to him,” Hermione conceded obstinately. “But it still doesn't give him the right to act the way he does.”

“That's just how he is,” Amanda said with a wearied sigh. “You can't change it. It's who he is.”

“How can you stand it?” Hermione asked with frank honesty. “Why do you hang around him if he acts like this?”

Amanda flushed and looked away from Hermione, biting her lip hesitantly as she opened her mouth. A frown came over her face and she closed it with an audible snap, content to respond with a half-hearted shrug of her shoulders.

Hermione frowned, feeling hesitant to continue but she plunged on.

“Amanda, be honest with me,” She said and took a deep breath, lowering her voice and leaning in closer to the blonde girl. “Does he...hurt you?”

“What?” Amanda asked, blinking in incomprehension.

“Does he abuse you?” Hermione asked again, just as softly as the first time. “You act like he's perfect, even when he's a dick to you, and you don't seem to be able to get away from him. What does he do to you that makes you act like that?”

“Abuses me?” Amanda repeatedly sharply, as if she couldn't believe what she was hearing. A look of anger flashed across her face as she stared at Hermione in stunned disbelief. “How could you even think that Harry would do that to me?”

“I can think it quite easily,” Hermione snapped, feeling quite miffed over Amanda's reaction to a perfectly normal question. “I can also see him doing it.”

Amanda let out a loud growl of anger, her fingers digging into the side of her chair as she unconsciously flexed them.

“He does not...” She began, spluttering with anger and indignation. “How dare you even think that...I've never...he's never...Hermione, what are you talking about?”

“Amanda, you can tell me if he does,” Hermione said in what she thought was a patient and understanding tone. “If he's hitting you, or worse, then we can tell a Professor. They can protect you from him...”

Hermione was suddenly cut off as Amanda lunged from her seat, fury on her normally pleasant face. The bushy-haired girl blinked and started to stand as well, before Amanda raised her hand and swung her arm. There was a loud smack of flesh hitting flesh and the Common Room went quiet as Hermione gave a shriek of pain as she was slapped across the face. Due to the force of the blow, she lost

her balance and fell to the ground, staring up at Amanda with shock as tears welled in her brown eyes.

Amanda loomed above her, looking far angrier than Hermione had ever seen her before. There was a deep-seated pain in her eyes as she leant down, eying Hermione with pent-up anger.

“You better listen to me, Granger,” Amanda said quietly with repressed fury, her words echoing throughout the Common Room. “Harry may not be nice, he may not be caring and he may not be warm and fluffy like a hero should be. But he's still a hero.”

“Amanda...” Hermione started, blinking away her tears but Amanda continued, glaring at her angrily.

“He saved my life twice now,” Amanda said, jabbing her finger at Hermione’s direction. “He’s saved my entire family’s life. He’s battled one of the most evil people in the world just to save me, Hermione. Nicodemus, the assassin- he offered to let Harry go but Harry still fought against him when he had no reason to. He doesn’t even like my family. My father and Harry hate each other! Harry despises everybody who’s like my father but he still stuck up for me because he thought it was the honourable thing to do! Harry is stuck in this stupid tournament because he tried to help me!” She said quietly. “He’s fought against a Drakon that wanted him dead because he tried to help my family! For God's sake, he's given up his home and his lifestyle just to honour his debt!”

The Common Room was silent as Amanda bent down, leaning in closer to Hermione. She continued in a softer, but still audible voice.

“Deep down, Hermione, no matter how nasty he can be, no matter how mean or rude or arrogant he is, he's a good person,” Amanda said softly, her anger fading away as she sighed. “Despite everything that he has going against him, he’s still a good person.”

Hermione frowned, not understanding what Amanda was talking about. Amanda shook her head, almost sadly, and finished.

“You have no idea what he is, Hermione, of what he could become and what he could do, to see him doing this is, well, it just proves how decent he really is.”

“Bravo,” somebody called out loudly. “Just bravo.”

Amanda started and whirled around as a loud clapping filled the Common Room, her eyes wide.

“That was magnificent,” Harry stated, still clapping as he walked down the stairs from his dorm. “That was a magnificent speech, Brat. Complete and utter bullshit? Sure, but still magnificent. I am...truly touched by your opinion of me. I'm going to go now, and save small puppies and little kittens in your honour.”

“Oh, shut up,” Amanda said, blushing and ducking her head. Her long blonde hair hid her face from view and muffled her next words. “So you're ready to go to Defence against the Dark Arts?”

“You were waiting for me?” Harry asked, blinking in surprised and gave a mocking sigh. “Ah, I'm touched again. Really, you're kindness and support just may change my evil ways and make me become a 'good' and 'decent' person.”

“Will you just shut up?” Amanda said exasperatedly, still blushing as she gathered her textbooks. She glanced down at Hermione, who was more stunned than hurt as she stared up at Amanda with wet eyes, holding her cheek with her hand. “Sorry, Hermione. I guess...um...I'm...just sorry.”

“Hermione, she may be right,” Harry said seriously as stepped away from the bushy-haired girl, who glared at Harry with something like hatred on her face. “Underneath my cruel, callous exterior, I really could be a decent person trying to do the right thing.”

He turned and gestured at the portrait door and Amanda obediently trailed after him as he made his through the Common Room. The portrait swung open and Harry made out to leave, before he turned his head around and stared at Hermione.

“And if we're going to go with that train of thought,” He said thoughtfully, tapping a finger on his chin. “Then underneath my cold, callous and heartless exterior, I could also be a chicken.”

Hermione blinked.

“Or a donkey,” Harry said in mock-thoughtfulness. “Or a rabbit. Or a cat. Or a two-headed pigeon- and yes, brat, before you ask- they do in fact exist. I was practising some of my curses on them one day and one of them became a little... deformed, I think is the right word.”

Behind him, Amanda closed her mouth with a snap as her attempt to retort to Harry's rant failed before it had started.

“I could also be a fish, saltwater, of course, not freshwater,” Harry continued and turned around, heading out of the portrait hole. Amanda's voice drifted back in as the two moved away from the Common Room.

“You're going to run with this for a while, aren't you?” She asked in part-exasperation, part-humiliation. “I'm not ever going to live this down, am I?”

“Hell no,” Harry's mocking voice drifted in, ending with a scoff of derision. “I'm a good and decent person? Please, I almost had an aneurism trying not to snigger.”

“I'm just impressed that you tried to hold it in,”

“What, and ruin your speech? It was just that amusing that I needed to hear the rest of it.”

The voices trailed off into indistinguishable murmurs as Hermione picked herself off the ground, gingerly touching her cheek and staring out of the portrait hole after them.

“I hate him!” She hissed angrily.

“Imperio!”

Harry watched with absolute fascination as a Slytherin girl, Daphne Grass-green or something, blinked, her eyes glazing over. The normally primp and proper girl gave a loud giggle and skipped to the end of the classroom, chanting a rather ridiculous Wizarding song about cauldrons and broomsticks.

The class burst out with laughter at Daphne and Moody abruptly flicked his wand, ending the Imperius Curse on the dark-haired girl.

‘Of the three Unforgivable Curses, It is that one that I can see the most potential for,’ Meciél mused, a touch wistfully. ‘I almost cringe when I remember the amount of effort I needed in the past to secure the loyalty of a dubious informant. This curse would be most helpful.’

‘Tell me about it,’ Harry thought, leaning back into his chair as he watched Daphne blush and scamper back to her seat. ‘Of course, of the three Unforgivable Curses, it’s the one that I can’t get to work.’

We’ll work on that,’ Meciél promised seriously.

The class was still laughing when Moody whirled around angrily. The glower on his gnarled face was enough to still the class into silence and they fidgeted under his furiously spinning blue eye.

“You’ll be doing this,” he growled, the scars on his face twisting up and making him seem uglier than normal. “It takes a lot of willpower for a wizard or witch under the Imperius Curse to overthrow the caster, and frankly I don’t believe any of you have got what it takes.”

The class gulped as one as Moody let his eye roam across the room, but the anger from his face was gone as bent down to tick a name off the scroll on his desk. He stood back up and faced the class again, a mean smile on his scarred face.

“Alright,” He said gruffly. “Who’s next?”

Amanda shifted nervously in her seat and threw a hesitant glance at Harry. When she didn't receive whatever she was looking for, she gave a sigh of resignation and stood up from her seat. She walked to the front of the room and took a deep breath, staring Moody with determined eyes as she tensed up, mentally preparing to put up the fight of her life.

“Imperio!”

Harry watched as Amanda blinked, and for a moment it looked as if she was, of all things constipated. The expression cleared up in an instant and her eyes seemed to glaze over for just a brief second. An instant later and the eyes cleared up, although Harry idly noted that they were a little duller than they had been before. Suddenly, Amanda jumped up on one foot and hopped across the front of the room, making noises similar to that of a sheep as she paraded herself in front of the class.

The rest of the class had apparently learnt their lesson and apart from the one or two repressed sniggers, they kept silence. However, Harry couldn't help himself and he burst out a loud, deep chuckle, shaking his head in amusement. Apart from Amanda, who had started making noises like that of a cow, every eye in the room swung towards him but Harry ignored them all as he continued chuckling to himself. Within his mind, Meciél also throbbed with amusement and maybe a hint of satisfaction as well.

“Is something funny, Potter?” Moody asked dangerously, his face twisting up into a picture of grotesqueness as he scowled at Harry.

Harry was still laughing and could only point at Amanda, who had moved on from farm animals and was letting out tiny high-pitch growls of a dog- a very small dog, by the sound of it.

Moody growled and flicked his wand, dispelling the curse and leaving Amanda on one foot with a puzzled expression on her face. She flushed, especially after hearing Harry's laughter, and placed her foot on the ground. She took her seat quietly, ducking her head shyly,

while Harry shook his head in amusement once again and let his chuckles die away.

“If you think it’s so funny then why don’t you come and try it?” growled Moody, his one good eye narrowed as he glared at Harry. “Let’s see how you like being controlled then, Mr Potter.”

“You don’t want to go there,” Harry warned lightly, the smile on his face fading away as he took in Moody’s apparently hostile stance.

The Dark Wizard catcher really seemed to be taking this training seriously, as if he had had previous experience with it before, and Harry briefly wondered what had happened to the man that had made him loathe any signs of laxness around the Imperius Curse.

“We’ll see, Potter,” Moody said softly, dangerously. For once, the glowing blue eye in his socket and Harry shrugged carelessly, rising from his seat and walking to the front of the room.

“Don’t say I didn’t warn you,” He said easily and the class was silent, eyeing both him and Moody with looks of anticipation. Even Amanda had looked up, although she seemed to be glancing at Moody with something like pity on her face. Apparently she was one of the few who remembered what had happened to Snape.

Moody, however, missed this look and levelled his wand at Harry, who buckled down both his own and Meciél’s instincts and stood still, allowing Moody to take aim.

“Imperio!” Moody barked.

Harry blinked as something struck his mind, a tiny needle of magic that instantly enveloped his mind. It was as if he was floating high in the sky, with a soft breeze gently wiping away every thought and worry, leaving nothing more than a vague, untraceable happiness. This sensation only lasted for a brief instant, not even a second, before Meciél reared in his head. The smell of burning sulphur filled his nostrils and a blazing warmth flashed through his veins as Meciél banished the unwanted mental intrusion with a roar of ancient and

boundless fury, her terrible voice shattering Moody's Imperius Curse and dealing the caster a powerful mental backlash.

Harry blinked as Moody's spell broken and watched as the grizzled ex-Auror was hurled aside by the backlash of his spell, flying through the air by the sheer force of counterattack and landing on top of his desk with a loud thump. Moody's head rocked backwards and Harry saw surprise twisted on his scarred features, before crippled man suddenly went limp as his head slammed back into the desk.

Harry grinned, looking quite smug, and he turned back to the class. The students were silent for only an instant as their brains finally perceived what they had just witnessed, and then they applauded loudly. Harry bowed to the clapping students, flourishing his arms with an elaborate twist and soaking up the praise.

'Have you ever considered, beloved, that you may have an ego-problem,' Meciell said amusedly.

'Oh, shut up,' Harry thought lightly. 'You enjoy it as much as I do.'

'I truly doubt that.'

After seeing that nobody else was going to do it, Hermione left her seat and made her way up to Moody's prone form with a look of concern and anger on her face. There was a reddish bruise forming on her cheek where Amanda had slapped her and she looked absolutely furious as she glared at Harry, but she slunk by him without a word and waved her wand over Moody.

The class quietened as Moody blinked groggily. Hermione gave a screech of surprise and even Harry took a startled step backwards as Moody moved a lot faster than Harry could have every predicted, especially given his appearance and injuries. The ex-Auror had suddenly vaulted himself off the desk and his wand zooming into his hand as he landed on his wooden leg with a dull thump. He stood at the head of the classroom, his magical eye spinning furiously in its socket as he surveyed his surroundings, looking furious and grim.

For a moment, Harry thought that the paranoid old man was going to attack, but Moody merely turned back and stared at him. Harry, never the one to back down, gave Moody a cocky smile and winked cheekily. Moody's good eye seemed to narrow, before a nasty grin came across the cripple's face, making him look truly hideous.

"That, Potter, was the best defence to the Imperius Curse I have ever seen!" He started with a grim approval. "I have never heard of anything like it. Tell me, laddie, how did you do it?"

"A bit of this, a bit of that," Harry answered vaguely, looking pleased with himself. "It's all in the hips, really."

Moody nodded, accepting that he wasn't going to get an answer.

"Well," He growled with a nasty smile of approval. "Nobody will ever be able to control you, will they?"

"Oh, you'd be surprised," Harry said, shrugging carelessly. "The voices in my head constantly get me to do things I don't really want to."

'Oh, do stop your whining, beloved.'

'It's not whining if it's true.'

Moody blinked and then roared with laughter, heartily slapping Harry on the back. Harry grimaced at the contact and moved back to his seat, slouching down and staring out the window as Moody called up another student. The smug smile on his face remained there for the entire lesson.

Later that day, Harry found himself once more in the abandoned classroom he had claimed as his own, crouching over a desk with a frown of concentration on his face. He waved his wand, the runes absent of the normal red glow of Hellfire, and on the table a pile of sand shimmered and became a beautiful glass bowl. Harry let out a sigh but otherwise made no other sound, lowering his wand and waiting in silence for almost a minute. The glass bowl perfectly intact and Harry gave a cheer, a smug smile on his face.

“Oh yeah,” He crowed, jumping up from his seat. “Who’s the best? C’mon, who’s the best? You know its me.”

‘ Well done, beloved. You have passed Second Year Transfiguration,’ Meciél said wryly.

“I know,” Harry said, looking very pleased with himself. He eyed the glass bowl carefully. “I’m that good, aren’t I?”

‘Was there any doubt?’ Meciél asked.

“Of course not,” said Harry, and he gave his wand a sharp flick. The glass bowl suddenly shattered with a loud cracking noise and dissolved back into a small pile of sand. “Can we move to the fun stuff now?’

‘When you put it like that,’ Meciél said with amusement, before her tone became more business-like. ‘Now, concentrate on the sensations in your mind and relinquish control movements as I perform this spell.’

Harry frowned but he nodded, taking in deep breaths and relaxing his mind. Although he counted on Meciél for the vast majority of his mental protections, he had also developed the essentials of mental control during his earlier training, when he had been very susceptible to the raw emotional influences of Hellfire.

Suddenly, Harry blinked and a blazing heat spread through his body as fast as a flash. In a single moment, Harry had become a fully functional person into a living statue. His body was not his own anymore as he felt a presence settle over his mind. He could feel, see, smell and taste, but he couldn’t move any part of his body.

Harry fought down a wave of panic and anxiety, and he felt his body take a deep breath, helping him calm down. His hand moved up, clasping his wand and levelling it at one of the few remaining desks within the abandoned classroom. The runes on his wand blazing with

Hellfire, and his arm moved in a sharp, flicking movement, with an odd twist of his wrist at the end of his flick.

“Effodio!” Harry heard his voice murmur.

There was a loud bang, like a backfiring car, and a brief flash of silver light. The desk was knocked back by the force of the spell, wooden splinters and sawdust flying through the air as a large gouge was torn into it, no smaller than the size of Harry’s fist. Harry felt a twinge of enthusiasm as he saw the effects and he briefly wondered what that spell would do to a human being.

Suddenly, as soon as it had come, Harry could move again and he automatically let out a loud sigh as he felt the blazing presence leave the forefront of his mind. He stared at the desk with curious green eyes, an impressed look on his face as he took in the full effects of the powerful gouging curse.

“It sounds sort of like a gun,” He said thoughtfully, scratching his chin.

‘It has a similar effect, beloved,’ Meciél said. ‘However, the damage is much more severe. And, of course, the curse travels much slower than a bullet and a skilled wizard will be able to repel and deflect it.’

“It could be useful,” Harry agreed and fiddled with his wand, absently trying out the wand-movements he needed.

‘Indeed it could, especially since you seem to find yourself being ambushed every few weeks,’ Meciél said with a somewhat sour tone.

Harry frowned.

“Not my fault,” He grumbled, feeling stung by her comment.

There was a flicker in the corner of his eye and Harry didn’t need to look to know that Meciél had appeared as a visual illusion. The Fallen sighed and walked over to him, placing a warm hand on his shoulder. Harry unconsciously sighed as a flash of blazing heat ran through him

and resisted the urge to lean back into the touch, knowing full well that there was nothing there to stop him from falling over.

“I know it is not your fault,” Meciél said with a faint note of apology in her voice. “I am merely concerned, as you should be as well, over our unknown enemy’s next move.”

“We’ll crush them,” Harry said and snorted derisively. “We always do.”

“Do not become over-confident, beloved,” Meciél warned softly and idly ran her hand over his cheek. “You have dispatched two very powerful opponents, that is true, but do not delude yourself in thinking that this is a winning streak we can keep up. The Drakon was defeated with Maeve’s help and you know very well that calling upon such power will inflict a much higher price. Nicodemus, of course, could not have been defeated without the Knight.”

“We were lucky,” Harry said and turned around to stare Meciél in the eye. “I know, Meciél, believe me, I know. But that’s not to say that I’m not unskilled.”

“Of course not,” Meciél agreed and withdrew her hand, staring at Harry with something like pride on her features. “Of all my hosts, you are easily the quickest learner. I do regret not choosing a wand-wizard such as you before. I did not believe that they could be so...”

“Handsome?” Harry offered with a cheeky grin. “Powerful? Fantastic? Skilled? A great conversationalist?”

“Versatile,” Meciél said with amusement and reached out with a hand, ruffling his hair.

Harry gave a half-hearted scowl but made no attempt to stop Meciél as he turned back to the desk, frowning quizzically as he tested out the wand-movements again, trying to mimic what Meciél had done.

“I have noticed that you have become quite settled here at Hogwarts,” Meciél said carefully as she withdrew her hand. “You seem to have taken to this lifestyle quite well, I believe.”

“I have?” Harry asked, blinking in surprise.

“Oh yes,” Meciél said earnestly. “Your level of whining has gone down considerably.”

“Ha, ha, ha, ha,” Harry uttered sarcastically, rolling his eyes. “Besides, free food, free bed, free to act like I want-“

“Apart from your promise to avoid harming the students,” Meciél broke in, her expression a mixture of amusement and disapproval. “Although I do recall you breaking that promise a few days ago.”

“Hey, Malfoy deserved it,” Harry said hotly, wagging his finger in Meciél’s face. Meciél lifted an eyebrow but did not respond. “He blabbered to that crappy newspaper these guys have. Besides, technically...technically, I didn’t actually...”

He trailed off, a frown on his face as he tried to think a way around it. Meciél merely looked amused as she folded her arms.

“Yes, beloved?” She asked lightly. “You were saying...”

“Well...um...” Harry hesitated. He let out a sigh and rolled his eyes. “Fine, I broke the promise. Sue me. As I was saying, it’s not a bad life here.”

“Would you consider staying then?” Meciél asked carefully, eying Harry closely. “I believe that you could learn much here.”

“Ah, no,” Harry uttered flatly, shaking his head. “This is like a little holiday, really, not a permanent residential move-in. Besides, I miss the apartment.”

“Very well, beloved,” Meciél said, bowing her head in a show of subservience. An instant later, her illusion disappeared.

Harry frowned, knowing full well that he hadn’t heard the last of that issue. He shrugged it off and turned back his target, lifting his wand. With deft movements, he flicked it in the pattern that Meciél had programmed into his autonomic nervous system and allowed Hellfire to flare through his wand.

“Effodio!” He incanted loudly

There was a silver flash, akin to the one there was with Meciél’s demonstration, but it was duller and less brilliant. Instead of a loud crack, there was a soft splutter as the target, the desk, was struck by the curse. It splintered and cracked, flakes of wood peeling off as an invisible force slammed into it, but the gouge was barely the size and depth of a coin. Harry growled softly under his breath and lowered his wand, frowning.

‘Your wrist movement was slightly off,’ Meciél supplied helpfully. ‘Twist it a little more but make the flick a little less pronounced.’

“Okay,” Harry said and raised his wand to try again. “I’d like to get this and a few more perfected before the Second Task comes around.”

‘We have close to two months to accomplish that, beloved, and you are a fast learner,’ Meciél reassured him. ‘Are we on a schedule that I am unaware of?’

“No, our enemies are on a schedule that we are unaware of,” Harry said flatly. “There are still people wanting to kill us, Meciél. We better get prepared in case they strike during the Second Task.”

‘A wise choice,’ Meciél said sagely.

“Of course it is,” Harry said and smiled, plastering a haughty expression on his features. “I thought of it.”

‘ Oh, beloved,’ Meciél sighed in good-humoured exasperation. ‘Sometimes I wish I had a corporeal form, just so I could hit you.’

“Can’t you make me feel like you hit me?” Harry asked.

‘I can,’ Meciél answered. ‘But there’s just not the satisfaction of bare flesh hitting bare flesh.’

“You have weird sexual preferences,” remarked Harry, shaking his head in mock-sadness. “It’s a wonder that I turned out so well.”

‘Must you relate everything back to sex?’

“I’m a fourteen-year-old male, Meciél,” Harry answered dryly. “That should pretty much answer it for you.”

Meciél sighed but made no comment.

Despite Harry's denial to Meciél's accusations, he had to admit to himself that he was becoming quite settled at Hogwarts. The two months between the start of the first class and the Second Task seemed to roll around quickly. Harry had devolved a schedule that allowed him to attend the few classes he wanted, especially DADA and Transfiguration, but he had totally blown off Charms, Potions and the two electives he had chosen and never gone back to. Instead, this free time allowed him to practise with both his wand and his sword. The fight with Nicodemus had revealed just how lacking Harry's sword skills were against a skilled opponent, and although there weren't many beings that still used the antiquated weapons, the few that did wouldn't mind seeing Harry dead.

The day of the Second Task was cold and cloudy. Dark and threatening clouds loomed across the sky, casting a dull shadow over the Hogwarts Lake and the grounds surrounding it. At the edge of the lake, seemingly oblivious to all of his surroundings, Harry stared at the rippling water with a pensive look on his face. A cold breeze washed over him and Harry shivered, unconsciously rubbing his arms. A look of total derision swept over his face as he sat at the lake, shaking his head in annoyance.

He had long ago translated and solved the mystery of the golden egg, although he still puzzled on what they had taken. He had checked his belongings earlier that day to see if anything was missing, but it was all there. Although Meciél and Harry had devised a way to modify a bubblehead charm to allow him to breathe underwater and suppress his natural buoyancy, he was starting to wonder if it was really worth throwing himself into a lake.

With a frown on his face, Harry moved to the water and touched the tip of it with his bare foot. He shuddered and quickly pulled his foot back, shaking his head as an icy cold sensation shot through his body.

"Oh, hell no," Harry muttered. "I'm not freezing my arse off just to play in some stupid tournament."

‘I can dull the coldness if you wish,’ Meciél offered. ‘It will seem quite warm.’

“Yeah, but it won’t be,” Harry said and frowned. “I feel temperature for a reason, Meciél. It tells my brain that I will freeze to death if I ignore it. The safest thing to do would be to go back to that tent and have a nap.”

‘You mean the laziest thing to do,’ Meciél said amusedly.

“Hey,” Harry said with a shrug and a faint smile. “You can’t blame me when safe and lazy reach the same conclusion.”

Meciél throbbed with amusement, a literal pulse of heat shooting through Harry’s body as he turned away from the lake. The first thing he saw was the judge’s table, a massive podium covered with a shining golden fabric that had been placed just next to the waterfront. Several white tents had been set up around it and large stands loomed in the background, filled to the brim with students and adults.

Harry ignored it all as he strode back to the small group of huddled champions near one of the tents that had been set up nearby. Fleur and Cedric were shivering in loose bathing suits – although Fleur looked good enough to make Harry take a second glance, while both Krum and Richard wore heavy robes over their forms

“How’s the water?” Cedric asked, rubbing his arms as he turned his head towards Harry.

“Cold,” Harry replied shortly and came to a stop. “Unless they’ve somehow removed your testicles and- oh, excuse me Fleur, your ovaries, and taken them down there, then I don’t think it’s worth it.”

Cedric gave a barking laugh and looked away glancing at the lake. Richard echoed him, shivering madly as he blew on his hands. Krum just shook his head sourly, giving Harry a disgruntled scowl while Fleur glared at Harry, her anger making her beauty even more pronounced.

“You are a very rude little boy,” The beautiful French witch spat out, derision and scorn in her voice as she eyed him up and down.

Harry blinked and turned his head to meet Fleur’s angry blue eyes.

“Excuse me?” He said softly, eying Fleur with the beginnings of a scowl. “Did you just call me a little boy?”

“Yes, I did,” Fleur answered airily and waved him off. “Go 'ome, little boy. Isn't eet past your bedtime? We wouldn't want you to get scared and wet ze bed now, would we?”

“Is that a challenge?” Harry asked with narrowed eyes, the beginnings of a predatory smile curving his lips. Because I will crush you, you little French slut, like Goliath crushed David.”

Fleur flushed, partly with anger and partly with wariness. Like everybody else, she had not forgotten about the Drakon incident, and Nicodemus’ attack and the rumours that had spread out afterwards had only added to Harry’s infamy. She scowled at Harry, but most of the heat in it had gone and she glanced away a few moments later.

“Um...didn’t David kill Goliath?” Richard asked, blinking in confusion.

“A mere technicality,” Harry shrugged and frowned. “Besides, demons will sing before I believe that a four-foot twit could kill an armoured half-crazed soldier with a rock. A knife- sure, an arrow- why the hell not? But not a rock.”

“Er...” Richard uttered, his face screwing up in confusion. A moment later, he sighed and shook his head, dropping the subject.

Harry gave a lazy smile and turned away, just as he heard the sound of somebody loudly clearing his throat. He turned his head and saw Bagman standing up at the judges table, a brilliant smile on his boyish face.

“Welcome, Ladies and Gentlemen, to the Second task of the Tri-Wizard Tournament!” He began cheerfully. The audience in the

stands burst out into loud cheers, students standing up and clapping madly or waving brightly coloured banners around.

Bagman chuckled and raised his hands, partially silencing the crowd as he continued.

“Now, as you may have guessed, the Champions are required to go down under the surface of lake and search for what that which has been taken from them. They only have one hour to do this. If they return after the time limit, then they will lose points. If they return without the thing that was stolen from them, then they will also lose points. It is up to the Judges. Champions, approach the lake.”

The huddled group of cold champions started towards the lake amongst the sound of applause and a roaring ovation from the audience. Harry was among them as he pulled out his wand, flicking it idly through the air. As he did this, harmless dark red sparks occasionally zapped from his wand and Fleur shrieked as one shot past her head. She glared at Harry but the Denarian ignored her as he poked the water with his toe and sighed.

‘Are we participating now?’ Meciél asked. ‘I thought the water was too cold, beloved.’

“I’m a Triwizard champion, the fifth chosen from the goblet of fire, representative of all the young witches and wizards of Hogwarts. They’re looking up to me to win this for them,” Harry muttered softly, staring down at his toes as he approached the shoreline.

‘I see,’ Meciél said slowly and paused. After a few moments, she spoke up again ‘Please, beloved, like you care. Let me guess- The French girl?’

“The French girl,” Harry confirmed in a low voice, peering down into the murky depths of the lake. “You heard what she said to me.”

Meciél sighed to herself.

‘Have you ever considered that you may have a temper problem?’ She asked in exasperation.

“So the voices in my head tell me,” Harry replied softly, a smile curving his lips.

Apparently, it wasn’t soft enough and Cedric looked up from the lake and stared at him oddly, a puzzled frown on his face. He opened his mouth, hesitated, and then closed it again with an audible snap.

“You’re...a little weird, you know,” The Hufflepuff eventually said, staring back into the lake as Bagman raised his wand.

“Believe me,” Harry said quietly, a mischievous smile on his face. “I know all about it.”

Suddenly a loud crack ripped through the air and the champion’s all dove for the water. Harry took a deep breath and dove with them, landing in the freezing water with a loud splash. Instantly a biting cold slammed into him and Harry jerked as he yanked his head out of the water, shivering madly. Just as quickly, the freezing water suddenly wasn’t cold at all. In fact, it was quite pleasant and warm, and Harry stopped shivering as he relaxed.

“Thanks Meciel” Harry muttered. Without sparing a glance to the audience or the judges, he took a deep breath and dove into the water.

Now that the water was warm, or at least, now that Harry perceived that the water was warm, he had no trouble in diving down as deep as he could go. As he did this, he pulled up his wand and tapped himself on the head, pouring his magic into the complex spell and ignoring the hiss and splutter of boiling water as the runes on his wand flashed hellfire red.

Almost instantly he could feel the spell surround his head and a soft high-toned buzzed in his ears as a pale blue down shot out from his head. The water around Harry’s head was propelled backwards, hissing as it was boiled, turned into oxygen and cooled in

milliseconds. Harry lowered his wand and peered out of the modified bubble-head charm, his vision tinged with the pale blue of the dome surrounding his head.

‘Allow me,’ Meciél murmured and suddenly Harry’s vision was restored, the blue hues of light dimming and winking out of existence.

For a moment, Harry felt a surge of panic as his hands shot up to his face. However, the bubble-head charm was still there and Harry felt a flush of embarrassment as he heard Meciél’s tinkling laugh.

“What did you do?” He asked loudly and he winced, his voice bouncing and ricocheting off the bubble-head charm and slamming into his ears. “Ouch.”

‘Do speak softly, beloved, or think your words,’ Meciél advised. ‘And as for your sight- I am merely suppressing the elements of your visual system that allow you to perceive that particular shade of blue. It is a simple feat, really.’

“Simple, yeah,” Harry muttered, albeit much softer than before, and he rolled his eyes. “Meciél, admit it. You rock.”

Meciél’s tinkering laugh filled his ears and Harry felt her give off a throb of affection, a rush of blazing heat that warmed his veins.

‘Of course I do, beloved,’ she said. ‘Now, shall we?’  
Deeper and deeper Harry dived; using both Meciél’s extensive knowledge and the swimming lessons he had received in primary school to propel himself through the water. The bubble-head charm wrapped around his head and although Harry couldn’t see it, he could hear it humming as it purified his air and kept the water away from his mouth and nose. As well as allowing him to breathe, the charm also suppressed his natural buoyancy and made swimming through the water quite easy and Harry could already faintly see the bottom of the deep lake.

The light from the surface was barely visible this far down in the lake and Harry frowned, whipping his wand sluggishly through the water. A bright flare of light burst into existence at the tip of his wand and Harry nodded in satisfaction; flick his wand and setting the ball of bright light to circle him as he took a good glance at his surroundings.

He was floating above the sea bottom, over what seemed like a forest of black, tangly seaweed that swayed almost hypnotically in the gentle currents. The only sound Harry could hear was his deep breathing as stopped to take a small rest. The light bobbed around him, casting an eerie glow over his surroundings, making them seem both mysterious and dangerous.

“Hey, Meciél,” Harry said slowly, staring around at his surroundings. “Was there anything in the egg that told us just where we had to go?”

‘No, beloved,’ Meciél said quietly. ‘I believe the entire purpose of this task is to seek out that which was stolen from you. There is probably a Mermen village nearby. It cannot be too far- they have only given you an hour.’

“Well, what...” Harry started, before he gave a strangled yell of shock as something slammed into him from behind. He twisted and flailed in the water, shock and fear flaring in his mind as he twisted his head around; searching for what had grabbed him.

There was an ugly creature, a wrinkled and small horned thing with bright yellow eyes and long, sturdy fingers- fingers that were clasped around his ankle. The creature bared its teeth at Harry, just as two others like it shot from the weeds and grabbed onto Harry’s clothes, trying to drag him down.

‘Grindylows,’ Meciél said quickly.

“Water demons?” Harry said, scowling in anger as he tugged his leg up, trying to wrench it from the Grindylows grip. He managed to partially free one of his legs and he slammed his foot down one of the hands. There was a soft cracking noise, which might have been

louder if Harry wasn't surrounded by water, and the Grindylow let out a muffled screech of pain, letting go of his leg.

'Yes, Water demons,' Meciell answered, sounding quite amused. 'They are very weak creatures- the descendents of a union between a demon and a merman, I believe.'

"Let's save the history lesson for later," Harry grunted and whipped his wand around, levelling at the head of the nearest Grindylow. "Any advice?"

'They have no special defences or powers,' Meciell answered. 'There is a spell to counter them; however, killing them will work just as well.'

"Good," Harry muttered darkly and flicked his wand. "Exturbo Arduro!"

Because Harry was surrounded by water, there was no blast of fire. Instead, there was a dull flash of light and suddenly hissing and boiling water was propelled at the Grindylow. It shrieked as it was struck in the face, letting go of Harry's leg. Dark red splotches had appeared where the boiling water had struck it and the Grindylow clawed at its face.

Harry whirled around as one of the water demons grabbed his shoulder, his green eyes glinting with anger. It dug its long, strong fingers into his shoulders, hard enough to leave bruises, and Harry levelled his wand at its face.

"Effodio!" He muttered grimly.

The Grindylow's heads napped back in a flash of silver light and a dull thumping noise, a shower of dark-green blood flooding from the gory hole where its face had once been. With a loud growl, Harry wrenched the creature's hand off his shoulder and kicked his legs, twisting himself in the water and levelling his wand at the other demons.

However, whether it was with the ease Harry had beaten them off or because he had just executed one of their own kind right in front of them, the other Grindylows were darting back into the dark weeds, disappearing in a flurry of bubbles. Harry stared down at the weeds with narrowed eyes as he lowered his wand, taken a deep breath. He idly kicked the body of the dead Grindylow away from him and leaned back, pushing himself away from the reeds at a leisurely pace.

‘That was a tad extreme,’ Meciél noted in amusement.

“That thing scared the crap out of me,” Harry muttered darkly. He continued to swim into the murky depths, watching the reeds a little more closely than he had before. Occasionally, he swung his wand behind him, banishing at the water behind him to give him a little bit more propulsion. Every few minutes, he would stop and frown as he peered around at his surroundings. To him, everything looked the same- dark wavy weeds, rotten wooden logs and algae-covered rocks.

“Meciél, we need to learn some tracking spells,” Harry muttered in disgruntlement.

‘Unfortunately, that is an area of magic that I do not specialise in,’ Meciél said, almost regretfully. ‘However, beloved, even if you cannot see it yet, there is a large amount of light coming from that direction.’

“Are you sure?” Harry asked and felt Meciél give a faint pulse of indignation. “Never mind, of course you’re sure.”

Suddenly, just as he was about to swim in the direction Meciél had directed, he noticed movement out of the corner of his eye. He looked up and the frown on his face was transformed into a smug smile. Above him, maybe fifty metres up, Fleur was struggling with some of the creatures he had fought with before, her blonde hair swirling in the air as she thrashed around, trying to tear their grip from her arm. The Grindylow’s were relentless, digging their fingers into her legs and arms and trying to drag her down, but Fleur was slowly gaining the upper hand.

Her face was wrought with panic and fear from behind her bubble-head charm as she ripped off the last of the Grindylows and kicked off towards the surface with the Grindylow's in close pursuit. Harry floated still for a second and gave a chuckle of satisfaction, shaking his head in amusement.

"Ah," He said with amusement, shaking his head and sighing with rueful satisfaction. "The French."

'Indeed,' said Meciél, satisfaction and amusement radiating from her presence.

A few minutes later, the field of muddy dirt and dark, oily weeds transformed into a pleasant field of light-green weed, like a two foot meadow of overgrown grass. Harry kept a careful eye on the weeds, almost wanting another creature to dart out so he could blast it into a thousand pieces. Because of this, he quickly noticed a looming large slab of stone filling his vision. As he swam closer he noticed crude paintings drawn all over it as the first of the Mermen village appeared.

The houses were made of dark grey stone, covered with green algae. Here and there, Harry saw faces peering out of the dark windows and floating around and above the village were the mermen. The creatures bore no resemblance to popular myth. They had greyish skin and long, dark green hair. Their eyes were yellow and oddly blank, seeming devoid of all human emotion. They wore thick ropes of pebbles and fish teeth around their neck and gazed at Harry silently as he swam past, a sudden chill coming over his body.

He continued to swim through the village, gliding past crude structures of stone and silent, unmoving mermen, who made no attempt to impede his progress. There was an odd silence in the air as Harry continued forward, suddenly feeling wary and cautious. He noted that the village seemed to be devoid of all activity and frowned.

His frown cleared up and was replaced with a look of incredibility as he came into view of the mermen equivalent of a village square. There were dozens of Mermen here, these ones carrying large and wicked-looking spears as they floated around a large and crude

statue of a merman with a crown on its head. Bound to the tail of this statue were five sleeping people, their heads lolling on their shoulders as their hair floated wispily around them.

“Hang on, what am I getting?” Harry said with a frown, stopping and floating in place as he stared at the figures oddly. “And who am I getting?”

‘I am unsure, beloved,’ Meciél said with a note of amusement.

“Well, it’s not that one,” Harry snorted, pointing at the unconscious form of Hermione, rolling his eyes. “Hell, if I knew that it was, I would have stayed on the surface and let them keep her. It’s not the little girl- I hate kids- and it’s not that Salem girl, she’s a brunette and I really don’t like brunette, and let’s not even get started on the Asian girl.”

‘I’m impressed, beloved,’ Meciél murmured. ‘You managed to offend several

“Yeah, whatever,” Harry muttered as he slowly drifted around the statue to stare at the final bound figure. “And...is that Amanda?”

‘Oh, Beloved,’ Meciél said after a moment’s pause, amusement and laughter in her voice. ‘The irony of this situation is far greater than you could possibly realise. I believe they think the thing you will miss most is the girl.’

Harry stared at Amanda’s unconscious figure and suddenly burst out into laughter, a deep chuckle rumbling his throat and echoing around his bubble-head charm. There was a smile on his face as he trailed off, shaking his head ruefully.

“These wand-wizards are lacking in brains, aren’t they?” He said, taking a deep breath and regarding the bound hostages.

‘Indeed,’ Meciél said in amusement.

It was at that moment that Harry suddenly realised that the mermen surrounding the statue had turned to him, their faces blank as they stared at him with soulless eyes. Harry narrowed his eyes and gripped his wand, a wary frown on his face as he took note of the surroundings. It seemed as if the mermen behind him had moved in closer but when Harry turned his head, they were just as still as the mermen around the statue.

“They are ugly little critters, aren’t they,” Harry murmured, shaking his head and turning back to the statue with a pensieve frown. “I don’t even want to know what how they were made. What was it, a human screwing a salmon? Or was it a trout?”

However, Meciél wasn’t even listening to him and Harry frowned, seeking out her presence. He found her within the deepest reaches of his senses, just as the Fallen suddenly blared with caution. Harry instantly became alert and his wand swivelled to the nearest mermen, an ugly creature with cracked teeth and hollow yellow eyes.

‘Something is wrong here, beloved,’ Meciél said slowly. ‘Something is very wrong. Use your sight on the mermen.’

“What?” Harry uttered in surprise. “You want me to what?”

‘Your Third Sight!’ Meciél hissed angrily, startling Harry. ‘Look beyond the physical surface, peer into true self of these creatures!’

“Okay,” Harry said carefully, an odd chill in his stomach. “Damn, I haven’t done this in years, even since the Dursley’s.”

He closed his eyes and felt a tingle in the back of his eyes, an itch on his retina. When he opened them, he stared at the mermen and gave quiet hiss of surprise. Harry could see the vague form of the merman, a grey-skinned fish-like creature. However, there seemed to be a black cloud of buzzing around its head, an oily puddle of slithering slime that made Harry both recoil in disgust and murmur appreciation. Sensations poured into his mind as Harry stared at the cloud of buzzing shadow, before he wrenched his eyes closed and shook his head.

“Urgh,” Harry muttered, the vision of what he had seen permanently imprinting itself on his mind- the price of such abilities. “It’s like a storm cloud and it smells like somebody has farted in the middle of a crowded train and they had had egg-plant for lunch.”

‘It is powerful black magic,’ Meciél says quietly, and Harry feels her presence sifting through his senses, picking up things that he couldn’t even perceive. ‘These mermen have been bewitched.’

“The mastermind?” asked Harry quietly, alert and wary as he held his wand steady at the nearest merman.

Suddenly the mermen sprung into motion and Harry blinked as they moved as one, turning to face him, their hands gripping their long spears.

“Creepy,” he muttered.

‘No, not the mastermind,’ Meciél murmured. ‘The magic is powerful, but crude. There is very little skill behind it. I am thinking that it may be a ritual, a mind fog, perhaps, to dominate and control the minds of these creatures.’

“So, new people then,” Harry said and sighed, scowling in annoyance. “Oh, for fuck’s sake, this is getting ridiculous.”

The Mermen were advancing on him now, raising their tridents and spears as they bared their cracked teeth at him. Their blank eyes promised pain and death as he darted through the water, moving at incredible speeds and closing the distance quickly. Harry growled and levelled his wand at the nearest creature.

“Effodio!” He hissed, the incantation ringing in his ears and around the bubble-head charm.

There was a silver flash of light and a loud crack, both muffled by the water, and the merman’s arm was ripped apart by a powerful blast of dark magic, the force of the spell severing the forearm from the body.

Green blood pumped into the water but the Mermen didn't seem to notice as it continued its advance at a faster rate.

"Fuck," Harry breathed, eyes wide as the bloodied merman darted towards him, using its flipper-like feet and hands to glide gracefully through the water. "Effodio!"

This time it was the merman's chest that was struck and it shuddered, halting in its advance. It blinked several times; the haze around its yellow eyes disappearing as it let out a screeching death cry, which faded into an odd gurgling noise as it went limp- a large fist-sized hole in its heart.

The other mermen paused for a single moment, taking in their dead kin with hollow eyes. It was at that instant that Harry knew that the wizard behind this was watching, perhaps even directing the creatures.

"Here we go again," Harry muttered, levelling his wand and allowing Hellfire to roar into him.

As one, the mermen charged at him, over sixty of the creatures swimming with all their strength and shooting through the water at enormous speeds.

At the same time, the first of the other champions appeared and Cedric watched with horror in his eyes as Harry and the mermen moved in against each other and prepared to fight.

Of all the fights that Harry had been in, this one was both the easiest and the hardest in many different aspects. During his time as a Denarian, Harry had fought against a Drakon, two powerful Denarians and a horde of demonised dogs. Some of them, like the latter, had been quite easy and well within his powers, and some of them, like the former, had required a little bit of outside assistance. In a way, Harry had quickly learned strategies in dealing with enemies that had far more power than you did.

Try not to get killed was the most prevalent one.

However, there had only been a few times when Harry was actually the powerhouse of the battle, the one wielding more power than his enemies. He had once killed a Troll, and that had been a fairly simple fight, but it had also been a single opponent. He had also fought against a dozen large demonised dogs and that had been slightly harder, even with a True-Wizard at his side. This fight, however, did not involve one enemy or even a dozen. No, there were five-dozen or so mermen bearing down on him- and they moved a hell of a lot faster than the dogs had.

‘You need to gain distance,’ Meciell advised quickly as Harry levelled his wand at the nearest of the approaching mermen.

“So I noticed,” Harry snapped, his eyes darting around him. As the first of the mermen came within close range of his wand, he gave it a sharp flick- Hellfire and anger burning in his eyes. “Effodio!”

The curse, powerful even with the minute trickling of Hellfire that Harry unconsciously placed into every spell, roared from his wand when it was fully charged with the dark energy source. A resounding boom burst from Harry and the water rippled underneath the pure force of the spell, the flash of silver light slammed into the mermen and reducing its frail body to a mass of green-bloodied pulp.

“Fuck!” exclaimed Harry, his eyes wide and appreciative as he stared at his wand. “I have a new favourite spell!”

‘Behind you!’

Harry whirled around, his wand reflexively slashing upwards as a merman loomed above him, a spear clasped in its hands. Hellfire flared the runes, a red light shimmering in the water as Harry deflected a blow that would have seen him skewered. His counter-jinx caused the spear to snap in two and sent the mermen spinning through the water with a flash of blue light.

“This isn’t... Effodio!” Harry barked mid-sentence, his powerful spell blasting through the water and splattering the nearest mermen with a

flash of silver light and a roaring boom. He twisted around, his movements jerky he flailed through the water. "Effodio!"

The closest mermen managed to look startled as the silver flash enveloped its head. Its corpse was flung backwards, flopping and turning in the water and slamming into two of its companions. By this time, the majority of the mermen were less than ten metres away from Harry, who levelled his wand beneath him.

"Waddiwasi!" Harry barked out the incantation for the Banishing Charm against the water beneath him. He felt the spell, fuelled by Hellfire, struggle to do the impossible and break apart- the backlash sending Harry shooting up at incredible speed and avoiding the four spears that would have impaled him a second later.

Harry was still shooting through the water and he could feel it streaming over his body and around his bubble-head charm. He looked down, a dark glint in his eyes as anger filled his mind. The mermen were following him up, moving much faster than he was and quickly catching up to him. He lowered his wand, a dark glint in his eyes, and Hellfire roared in his veins.

"Irruptus Ardor!" Harry bellowed loudly, his voice ringing in his ears as it bounced off his bubble-head charm.

The tip of his wand glowed with a rich crimson light and several bursts of heat and fire shot from the tip. Torpedos of rippling water-fuelled and boiled by Harry's Hellfire until they shone with a dim red light, shot down at the mermen. Several of them dodged, weaving in and around the rippling torpedoes, but there were too many of them for some not to get hit.

One of the mermen took one of them in the face and snapped backwards, the force of the blow driving it down towards the seabed. Another took one in the chest and was also driven backwards, halting and shuddering as it was impaled on the trident of one of its kin, who ignored it.

'Your spells are effective but there are too many of them!'

“You think?” Harry growled as the first of the mermen caught up to him. He flicked his wand, slashing it through the water. A glimmering arc of silver magic met the first merman, cleaving the frail creature in two, and Harry brought up his wand to deflect the spear of the second.

Wood met metal and Harry barked out a word as he held his wand against the Mermen spear. The mermen gave a startled cry as dark crackling energy poured from Harry’s wand and onto his spear, shuddering and jerking as the dark magic arced into him. Harry gave the mermen a powerful kick and levelled his wand above his head.

“Waddiwasi!” Harry barked out again and he was propelled through the water, zooming in closer to the mermen village.

He frowned, concentrating as he weaved Hellfire and wand-magic together. A bright glow appeared at the end of his wand and he brandished it as if it were a whip. A coil of glowing yellow flame, quickly suppressed and turned into boiling water, whipped out one of the mermen, binding itself around the creature and trapping it. The other mermen dodged their trapped companion and shot after Harry with blank eyes.

Cedric was now swimming down to the village and was throwing glances back at Harry, who continued to fight and kill the bewitched mermen. Behind him, distorted version of Krum followed him- looking half-human, half-shark. Closely following both of them was Richard, who looked as if he had turned himself into one of the mermen. The three champions eyed each other suspiciously, but the battle occurring no more than a hundred metres away was enough to make them work as a group and they moved for the statue, where the hostages had been bound.

Harry noted this as he slashed his wand through the water as fast as he could, gouging the chest of a mermen with a glimmering arc of silver. The next flick of wand caused one of the spears to shatter as it stabbed towards him, stopped by a faintly-glowing shield of green hues.

“This isn’t working real well,” Harry panted, breathing deeply as he levelled his wand at the next mermen, who was gliding towards him with a spear held over his head. A flash of silver light and a concussive boom and the mermen shredded apart. “I’m barely holding them...fuck!”

One of the mermen had seen an opening in Harry’s defences and had lunged forward. An instant later, Harry had brought his wand down on its head and crushed its skull with an orange flash of magic, as if he was carrying a mace and not a piece of wood. But its spear managed to dig into his coat, gouging into his skin and drawing a faint wisp of blood.

“Evertoxuro!” He snarled, anger flaring in his mind. From the tip of his wand came a giant spray of boiling water, steam hissing and spluttering as it was pushed forward and into the faces of the advancing mermen.

Some of them shook their heads and backed away, apparently wary enough to avoid the spell, but most of them seemed to be under the influence of the wizard behind all this to the point that they ignored the pain and advanced into it. Red blotches appeared on their grey skin as Harry growled, ending the spell. He flicked his wand from the spear that had almost killed him to the mermen.

“Waddiwasi!” He barked. The spear spun around and zoomed through the water. The lead merman was moving too fast to stop and swam right onto the spear, his mouth gasping pathetically as the shock and pain broke the spell on his mind. Two other mermen managed to impale themselves on this spear as Harry lifted his wand and propelled himself downward, closer to the village.

Harry took the ten to twenty seconds he had to take a rest, panting lightly. It was almost relaxing, the feel of moving through the water at these speeds, and if there hadn’t been a horde of bewitched mermen chasing him then he would have relaxed and enjoyed the sensations. However, there was a horde of bewitched mermen chasing him and Harry started to mentally prepare for the next confrontation.

‘I suggest your demonic form, beloved,’ Meciél recommended quickly and Harry paused in the middle of his mental recital of powerful curses.

“What, can that breathe underwater?” Harry asked in disbelief.

‘Yes,’ Meciél said. Harry blinked, idly deflecting a thrown trident away from him with a shimmer of pale-green magic.

“Oh,” He said and frowned. “Well, let’s get those morons out of here then. I have no intention of being lynched on the surface. When they’re gone, then we can have some sushi.”

‘I’m looking forward to it, beloved,’ Meciél said grimly and Harry could feel her excitement, her lust for battle and blood. However, he tried to block it out as best he could and propelled himself towards the hostages, moving out of reach of the mermen once again. At the same time, Cedric and the others were having problems of their own. Two of the mermen had stopped in the pursuit of Harry and had confronted the other champion. One of them had gotten into Cedric’s personal space and the Hufflepuff was desperately shielding himself from repeated stabs with a trident, a silver protego shield glimmering as it absorbed the blows.

The half-shark from Durmstrang, on the other hand, was clearly on the offensive. His unique form had given him an edge over the merman he faced and although there was large bloodied cut on his chest, he was currently snapping at the merman with sharp teeth. With a quick twist, Krum managed to sink his large teeth into the merman’s leg and he shook his head back and forth, trying to tear it off.

“Stupefy!” Cedric bellowed from behind his bubble-head charm. The merman caught a crimson blast of light right between the eyes but apart from a slight dazed expression on its face there was no other effect.

Cedric swallowed, panic flying over his features and pounding into his brain as the merman lunged at him. He had left himself open for this and flinched, waiting for the sensation of being stabbed to hit him. It never came as a blur shot past him and Cedric watched with amazement as Potter dealt with the Merman.

“Flagrate vires!” Cedric heard Potter snarl and a blaze of ruby light lit up the tip of his wand. The mermen tried to parry with the spear but Potter slipped the wand under, his green eyes glinting darkly as he dug the tip of his wand into merman flesh. The merman shuddered as the tip burnt into flesh and muscle and the hand reflexively convulsed, loosening on the spear. In a single deft movement, Potter lifted the spear with his left hand and drove the tip of his wand into the merman’s throat, killing it instantly.

Cedric just stared at Potter with wide eyes, barely noticing that Krum had just ripped the head off the other merman. On the other side of the statue, Richard was almost finished untying the hostages.

Harry saw the look he was receiving from Cedric and he rolled his eyes, an annoyed scowl on his face.

“Moron” he muttered from behind his bubblehead charm, knowing full well that Cedric can’t hear him. He gestured at the hostages, then at Cedric and then up to the surface. “Get the hostages and leave so I can go Chinese Takeaway on this whale-meat.”

Cedric obvious couldn’t hear what Harry was saying but he clearly understood the gestures. As Richard untied the last of the hostages, he moved forward and grabbed the pretty oriental girl and the small bonde girl, hoisting them both over his shoulder. Richard took the girl in Salem robes in one hand while taking Hermione with the other, while Krum prowled around them, moving silently through the water with a hunters grace in his half-shark form.

Harry barely noticed all of this as he saw that his twenty seconds of time was about to finish. From all over the village came the dozens of mermen, most of them clutching spears, tridents or some other weapons. He growled under his breath and levelled his wand at the ground, pushing his power into a powerful banishing charm and

propelling himself away from the statue and towards the edge of the large stone slab.

“Irruptus Ardor!” He barked, flicking his wand. Torpedoes of boiling water shot out of his wand as he zoomed across the desolate merman village, and they glowed with a dim red light.

The few mermen who looked as if they were going to chase the departing champions and hostages turned back to Harry after seeing the spell and advanced on him, their eyes gleaming with a foreign hatred and yearning as the Denarian propelled through the water again, ducking underneath the stone tablet and into the darkness. Harry dispelled the orb of glowing light that surrounded him and after tucking his wand away, he closed his eyes and transformed.

It only took a few moments as Harry, the human, turned into Harry, the Bone Wrym, just as the horde of mermen darted from stone slab and into the darkened depths. Harry didn't have a bubble-head charm around his head anymore but he couldn't tell the difference as he took a breath, the rage and bloodlust roaring in his mind.

What happened next was a massacre.

Harry was a raging armoured beast against a few dozen spears, and he moved with such ferocity and power that he had already killed five of the mermen before they knew what was happening. His wings of bone shot out, impaling mermen and slamming their bodies against each other as Harry swam through the water. His fists lashed out, crushing skulls with the palms of his hands and delivering furious punches that literally made mermen's heads snap back. His tail whirled around him, the thick armoured appendage slamming into mermen and pulverising bone into dust. The mermen darted around him, stabbing at him with their tridents, but the armour around his demonic form was simply too strong. Harry continued to rage, sulphur burning in his nose and his mind a vision of red-hazed bloodlust. Green blood drifted in the water as mermen were split open, beaten down and broken apart underneath Harry's fury.

After a few minutes of fighting, there was nobody left to fight and let out a roar of triumph, hearing nothing in his demonic form. The water

was thick with a green haze and Harry transformed back into his human form. Instantly, he tapped his wand over his head and reapplied the bubble-head charm. The pressure in his ears faded away and the water was pushed from his face, although the powerful scent of merman blood remained in his nostrils.

“That went well,” Harry said calmly, brushing himself off and looking at the gouge in his coat, where the mermen had nicked him with the spear before. It was no more than a shallow cut and Harry pressed his wand to the wound, wincing as he pushed heat into his wound and cauterised it.

‘It did indeed,’ Meciél said with a throaty laugh. ‘That, beloved, was truly fun.’

“It did have its moments,” Harry agreed tiredly. However, he was still in a state of constant wariness and looked for the slightest hint of movement as he propelled himself back to the mermen village, searching for any mermen stragglers. “Obviously, the best part was where I killed them all. Say, do you think mermen taste like fish?”

‘Judging by their scent, I’d say calamari,’ Meciél answered.

“Meciél, did you just make a joke?” asked Harry, his eyes wide with mock-surprise as he surveyed the village around him. There were no signs of life now and the place appeared to be desolate- ancient ruins lost in time. “And...who the fuck are you?”

Harry’s snarling question was directed at the shadowy figure behind him as he whirled around, his wand levelled at the figure’s head. Power glinted in Harry’s emerald eyes and Hellfire burned within his veins. It took him a few moments that the figure in front of him wasn’t really, rather, it was just an apparition- common enough in most long-distance communication evocation.

“Have you not guessed who I am?” The figure taunted, his face flickering with shadows as he stared down at Harry, apparently able to hear him through the bubble-head charm.

“I’ll take a punt here,” Harry said, lowering his wand with a disgruntled sigh. “The Easter Bunny, right? I still want an explanation to last Easter, you know. Just because I vandalised a church doesn’t mean you can skimp out on the caramel chocolate.”

“I am not the Easter Bunny, fool!” The shadowy spectre hissed angrily and dark lights whirled around him, a mixture of dark crimson and bright yellow hues that seemed to make apparition seem far more intimidating than he was previously.

“Really?” Harry asked earnestly, only faint traces of sarcasm in his voice. He rolled his eyes and gestured to flaring lights. “Nice lightshow. Totally fake, sure, but still very pretty.”

The wizard hissed but the lights faded away as Harry continued.

“I’m going to say that you’re the wizard that bewitched these mermen here to kill me,” Harry said carefully, and blinked as Meciél prodded a thought in his head. “And set that demon on me back in Chicago. You want me dead...and judging from what I can sense in you, you want something else as well.”

“I do want you dead,” The shadowy wizard hissed, his hands convulsing as if he wished to wrap them around Harry’s neck right at that moment. “And what I want- well, there are only a few things of value that you have.”

“The coin,” Harry concluded with a dangerous glint in his eyes. “You want my coin. Meciél’s coin. You want Meciél.”

“For a child, you’re very smart,” The wizard admitted grudgingly. “I have underestimated you, I think. You managed to defeat my demon with magic that not even I possess and you dealt with these pitiful creatures here without much effort at all. The power of your Fallen must be superb.”

“What do you want with Meciél?” Harry asked lazily, folding his arms over his chest. “Were you old roommates? Are you a friend of Nicodemus’? Are you trying to sell her long distance plans?”

“I don’t care about the Fallen,” The wizard scoffed, waving his gloved hand as if removing an annoying fact. “It could be any Fallen, any coin – I do not care. You just seemed like an easy target.”

“Power,” Harry said with narrowed eyes. “You want the power of a Fallen. You want Hellfire. You want Black Magic. You want to feel the intoxicating rush of searing heat roaring through your body as it empowers your every spell. You want to know things about magic and the world that no mortal on this planet could even behind to comprehend. You want more power.”

“I do,” The wizard hissed.

“Have you tried the Energizer bunny?” asked Harry, a mocking smile on his face, and he gave the wizard a thumbs up. “It’ll last twice as long as Duracell and it’s pink.”

“Oh, you will regret mocking me, boy,” the Dark Wizard threatened and the shadows around him warped with colours again, casting odd and threatening hues over the merman village and making the apparition seem much more intimidating. Harry rolled his eyes but ignored the light show.

“No, you will regret trying to kill me,” Harry said quietly, coldly, and his eyes glinted with power. “I vow that I will hunt you down and kill you for this. If you wanted a coin, you should have tried some other Denarian. Meciell is mine, Wizard, and she will always be mine, and you- well, you are nothing more than an unskilled and pathetically weak wizard! I will crush you, I promise you.”

The shadowy figure gave a scornful laugh, but it was tinged with nervousness and the apparition seemed to fidget under Harry’s dark gaze.

“You can’t match my power,” the Dark Wizard boasted. “I have trained myself in black magic for years. If you seek me out, I will kill you!”

“Oh, but I can match your power,” Harry said quietly, dangerously. “And even if I couldn’t -but I can, I could easily match your pathetic skills. I mean, you seem to know nothing.”

“I know magic that would make your very bones rot away,” the shadowy figure hissed angrily, leaning forward and coming off- to Harry- as whiny. “I know magic that would envelop your body with stone! I know magic that would bind you to my will for all of eternity! Do not push me!”

“Maybe you do and maybe you don’t,” Harry said and smiled coldly. “But I bet you don’t know much about communication spells. Do you?”

The figure frowned, staring at Harry uncertainly, unsure of where the Denarian was going with this.

“What? He spat out angrily. “What are you talking about?”

“Well, there’s a reason why people don’t use them in front of enemies,” Harry said and shook his head, eying the apparition darkly. A snarl came over his face and the figure flinched at the sight of Hellfire burning in Harry’s palms. “It leaves you open to counter-attack.”

Before the apparition could do anything, Harry thrust his hands into it and gave a cold smile. For a moment, nothing happened, but suddenly the shadowy figure screamed in pain, doubling over.

“I’m...I’m on fire!” He shrieked, his voice panicked as he slapped at his dark robes, trying to suppress a fire that was not there. “I’m on fire...I’m on fire! Stop it! No! Wait! You....No...AH!”

Harry watched with a grim smile on his face as the shadowy wizard howled and writhed, screaming in agony as Harry’s spell made him believe that he was burning alive. The wizard hadn’t known that by allowing your mind to traverse so far away from the body within the communication spell, it left you quite susceptible to mental attacks.

“Ignorance is a bitch, isn’t it?” Harry asked, giving a dark chuckle of satisfaction as the figure let out a loud, piercing scream.

Suddenly the apparition flickered and burst apart in a shower of multi-coloured sparks. The threatening flashes of colour faded away as Harry was once more alone in the merman village. He was still smiling as he quickly reviewed the area, seeing no movement whatsoever.

“That should keep him down for a few days,” Harry said cheerfully and then frowned. “Why do all the bad guys always feel the urge to brag and show off? For fuck’s sake, this isn’t a movie, you know.”

‘Indeed,’ Meciél agreed in amusement. ‘He seemed most...pathetic. I would not want him as a host. We will have to kill him when opportunity presents itself. Even the most pathetic of enemies can get lucky.’

“Yeah, I’ll look forward to that,” Harry uttered and rolled his eyes, shaking his head in annoyance and exasperation. “What a fucking git.”

With one last flick of his wand, Harry propelled himself up towards the surface of the lake and burst out of the water. He flopped down on in the shallows, content to lie there for a minutes, panting heavily. He looked up from the water as he heard a loud commotion not too far away, his face wearied but his eyes alert.

There was a low buzz of noise coming from the stands as the audience whispered and muttered to one another. Most of the judges were sitting at their table, looking both displeased and curious, but Dumbledore and Bagman were missing. Harry found them nearby, standing next to the tournament officials that had clustered around the group of wet champions and were talking furiously with Fleur, Cedric, Richard and Krum. The hostages had been woken up from whatever enchanted sleep they had been put in and were being led off, although Fleur seemed very reluctant to let go of the small blonde girl- her sister, by the looks of it.

“I leave for a few minutes and they start bitching,” Harry muttered tiredly as he staggered up out of the water, revealing himself to the tournament officials and the audience.

Cedric saw Harry first and his eyes widened as he gave a loud exclamation of surprise, pointing at Harry furiously. The champions and Tournament officials turned around and Harry heard a loud buzz of chatter bust from the stands as the group rushed over, Dumbledore and Bagman in the lead.

“Are you alright?” was the first thing Harry heard and it came from Cedric, who eyed Harry in concern.

“Why wouldn’t I be?” Harry retorted sharply, and then frowned as Cedric wordlessly gestured at his ribs. He looked down and saw a small wound in his side where that Mermen spear had grazed him. “Oh, I see.”

Before anybody could do anything, Harry lifted up his wand. He narrowed his eyes and the droplets of water clinging to his wand hissed and spluttered as a dim red hue of light grew at the tip. Cedric

frowned but Dumbledore's eyes flashed with recognition and he made to stop Harry, who grunted as he pressed the tip of his wand against his flesh.

There was the sound of sizzling flesh and Richard and Cedric took a startled step backwards, while Fleur looked on in revulsion and Krum raised an eyebrow, looking impressed.

'This is very crude, beloved,' Meciell said disapprovingly, but she did dull the flaring pain in his side until it was no more than a mile ache.

'There's no way I'm letting them get my blood,' Harry thought back and lifted his wand up, inspecting his wound with narrowed eyes. He had effectively cauterised the wound and only blackened skin remained of the bloodstained wound.

"I know, I know. It was a close one," Harry said sarcastically, lifting his eyes and staring back at the group. "I mean, if it had been seven inches higher and four inches deeper and I might have died. Only seven inches!"

"You could have died," Bagman said, looking stricken at the mere thought.

Harry blinked at his emotional response, eying the baby-faced wizard with disdain.

"I was being sarcastic, you dolt," He muttered, rolling his eyes.

"What happened, Potter?" Moody growled, his wand clasped in his hand as he limped through the crowd. His fake eye was rapidly spinning in its socket and his face was tight with anger and determination as he glanced over the lake. 'The others were saying something about mad mermen.'

"Oh no, not mad," Harry disagreed, shaking his head. "Try completely fucking insane. They went psycho and tried to kill us. Well, they tried to kill me." Here Harry jerked his thumb at the other champions. "These chicken-shits ran off as soon as they could."

Cedric and Richard shifted on their feet, apparently feeling guilty about that, but Krum remained motionless, staring at Harry with brooding eyes, and Fleur ignored him completely, rounding on the Tournament officials with anger as if Harry had not spoken.

“This shouldn’t have happened,” she spat, her beautiful face twisted up in anger. “You put my sister in danger! She could have died!”

“Ms Delacour, let me assure you that this wasn’t suppose to happen,” a young redhead official said, his boring eyes peeking out from behind horn-rimmed glasses as he stared at Fleur with a stern expression on his face. “The mermen showed no sign of aggression towards us when we approached them about the Second Task, In fact they were happy to participate.”

“They why did they try to kill us?” Fleur asked dangerously, her cheeks flushed and her swim suit plastered to her body. Harry took a moment to admire the beautiful witch, his eyes running down her legs and across her chest.

‘I thought you didn’t like French people?’ Meciél

‘Meciél, I’ll be honest with you. I don’t like anybody. I was just using racism as an excuse,’ Harry responded and gave an appreciative grin. Richard was doing the same and the two champion’s eyes met. Harry threw Richard a wink and silently gestured to Fleur, and the older boy grinned and nodded. ‘But I do like looking at beautiful women. Go figure.’

Meciél sighed, but there was more resignation than exasperation in her voice. Harry took his eyes of Fleur’s very-well formed legs and tuned into the conversation.

“...not meant to happen,” The redhead was saying exasperatedly, rubbing his tired eyes and shaking his head. “It is impossible!”

“ Allow me to speak to the Chieftainess, Percy,” interrupted Dumbledore, raising a placating hand in the air and forestalling the

next round of arguments. "I will discover exactly what happened under the lake and see to it that everything is made right."

"Very well," the redhead, Percy, started, before Harry cut him off, something like sheepishness on his face.

"The Chieftainess," He said slowly with a frown, gesturing to his head as he continued. "Is she a big fish-girl with a crown of pearls on her head?"

"Yes, I believe she is," Dumbledore said slowly and looked troubled as Harry smiled darkly.

"Yeah, you might have a problem getting in touch with her," The Denarian said slowly, a mock-sheepish grin on his face as he scratched his chin.

"Why?" The redhead asked suspiciously but Dumbledore sighed heavily, looking ancient and grim as he turned back to the lake with solemn eyes.

"She's been struck down with a mild case of death," Harry answered bluntly and shrugged as Bagman started, swivelling his gaze towards Harry with shock in his eyes. Moody, however, looked pleased and gave Harry a nod while Dumbledore continued to stare out into the lake, seemingly lost in his thoughts.

"What?" Percy exclaimed loudly, staring at Harry with horror in his eyes. "You mean..."

"It's a bit hard to live without your lungs," Harry said, shrugging easily. He gave a cold smile that made his youthful face seen oddly sinister. "Even if you are a sea-based creature."

"You killed her," Bagman said softly, the blonde and athletic wizard staring at Harry as if he couldn't believe what he was seeing.

“I killed them all,” Harry said flatly, almost challengingly. Bagman blinked and Percy recoiled in horror, but the champions seemed to take it into stride, perhaps because most of them had seen him slicing apart the mermen with his wand. “They all seemed very determined to kill me, so I had to defend myself.”

“I see,” Dumbledore said, turning back from the lake. His eyes were glinting with anger and for a moment Harry thought the old man would attack him as an almost-invisible aura of power surrounded the ancient wizard, like a static charge flickered through the air.

Bagman took a hasty step away and Percy flinched, but just as Harry prepared to grasp Hellfire, the aura of anger and power vanished and quick as it had appeared and Dumbledore sighed, looking very old and very tired.

“All of them?” Fleur asked softly, but not in horror. She was staring at him strangely. “You killed them all...to save us? To save my sister?”

“No,” Harry disagreed scornfully, shaking his head. “I killed them all to save myself.”

“Not very hero-like,” Cedric muttered but Harry heard him and shrugged.

“I’ve been told I’m selfish,” He admitted easily “It actually makes life a lot easier in the long run.”

Suddenly there was a shout from one of the wizards standing by the lake. The group turned around just as a merman popped out of the water with a soft splash. Its yellow eyes were tinged with madness and rage and it bared its broken, yellow teeth, yelling something in a high-pitch screech. Harry couldn’t understand what the creature was saying and before he could ask Meciél to translate for him, the mermen pulled a long trident out of the water and hurtled it at Harry with incredible speed.

The instant Harry had seen the trident, Hellfire had blazed in his veins and anger had raged in his mind. He raised his wand, his eyes glinting with dark power. However, Dumbledore was faster and in a flash of movement, the trident became a flock of chattering birds which soared into the air, over and above Harry's head.

The merman let out another screech and hurled another weapon- a spear, this time, but this one became a puff of smoke as Dumbledore flicked his wand. Moody limped forward, his wand out and his face grim, but Harry beat him to it and flicked his wand. The silver flash of light and the loud, noisy boom was all the warning the merman had before a fist-sized hole burst into his chest.

There was a spray of green blood and the merman let out a pained dying screech as it flopped back on the water, sending a spray of dark green blood over the murky lake. Fleur started beside him, a soft gasp escaping her throat, and the stands went into silence as the merman's corpse slowly sunk underneath the water.

Harry lowered his wand and ignoring the stares of shock, he turned back to Dumbledore. The Headmaster looked as if he was about to admonish the Denarian, his eyes dark with condemnation, but the serious look in Harry's normally mocking eyes was enough to silence his strong disapproval.

"They were enthralled," Harry said, his eyes narrowing. "By a wizard."

Dumbledore's eyebrows went up and his dark expression faded away, replaced with a troubled look. He tucked his wand into his purple and silver robes, appearing to be thinking carefully as the rest of the group blinked at the unfamiliar expression. Cedric spoke up for all of them.

"Enthralled? "

"It's a more complicated but much nastier form of the Imperius Curse," Harry explained. "The best way to free somebody from this

type of control is to kill the wizard who did it. But I can guarantee you that the wizard isn't anywhere near here."

"You are sure?" Dumbledore asked quietly.

"Oh yeah," Harry said grimly. "He presented himself as a spectre, and like a villain in a bad movie, he couldn't resist gloating. I gave him a bit of a nasty surprise though." Harry finished and smiled sadistically, anger and satisfaction flickering in his eyes.

"How so?" Dumbledore asked curiously, peering from behind his half-moon glasses with emotionless blue eyes.

"Let's just say he won't be able to look at a candle again in a very long time," Harry said, attempting to be mysterious. He gave a lazy grin and gestured at himself. "Now, can I go and dry myself off now?"

Dumbledore's eyebrows rose and he raised his wand, most likely to perform some kind of drying spell. However, Harry halted him with a raised hand, rolling his eyes and shaking his head.

"That was a subtle way of me saying 'I don't want to talk anymore, so I'm leaving. Call me when you have my score- and it better be good. I think I did exceptionally well on this task,'" Harry said and have a mocking smile.

He walked past the group, ignoring the protests from both Percy and Bagman as he strolled towards one of the white tents, eager to have a proper rest and catch his breath back.

Harry was in the tent, lazily sitting back in one of the chairs as he rested. Outside he could hear the loud buzz of the crowd and just outside his tent he could hear soft mutters from the other champions. Occasionally the word 'kill', 'slaughter', and his favourite so far 'massacre', brushed by his ears, but he ignored them for the most part and closed his eyes, giving a yawn. Although the Second Task hadn't taken a lot of him in terms of magic, he had done a lot of swimming and many of his muscles were aching.

“So, new bad guys,” He murmured softly, with a tired sigh. He opened his eyes and wasn’t surprised to see Meciél’s beautiful figure sitting beside him, looking thoughtful. “There’s always gotta be new bad guys.”

“New bad guys,” Meciél agreed. She tapped her fingers together. “Or bad guy, in this case. I believe his is acting alone.”

“Not a very good one,” Harry muttered scornfully and Meciél smiled.

“Indeed,” she said and Harry both felt and saw her amusement. “He is powerful, yes, but he lacks skill and training. He is an amateur who most likely has heard about the Denarian coins and the beings that reside within them.”

“He wants a Fallen living in his soul?” Harry asked with a frown. “No offence intended, Meciél, but I thought the majority of you lot don’t treat your hosts that well.”

“No offence taken, beloved,” Meciél said amusedly. “And yes, the vast majority of my kind do not particularly care for their hosts. There are very few who have a relationship like ours, and even then, not to this extent. We have something unique, beloved, and something special. I would not let a pathetic Wizard like that take you away from me.”

Harry didn’t reply to her somewhat sentimental display of emotion but his heart softened and he regarded Meciél with a genuine smile on his face.

“Besides, I would not be surprised if he believes that he could dominate my will and remain unaffected, while retaining my powers. There have been many like him before and they all fall in the end,” Meciél continued, scorn appearing in her voice.

“That’s not so hard to do,” Harry replied flippantly. “Dominate your will, I mean.”

Meciel raised an eyebrow, turning her head and staring at him with a hint of challenge in her silver eyes as a soft smile curved her lips upwards.

“Oh?” She said lightly, amusedly. “You believe you dominate my will?”

“Well, I do ignore you a lot of the times,” Harry answered, shrugging carelessly. “I mean, you’re all “Be nice to the rich and influential, beloved,” and “Don’t have sex with Maeve, beloved,” and I still slap pansy-boy to the ground and give Maeve a good time.”

“That advice was for your own benefit,” Meciel said and Harry could feel her exasperation, maybe even annoyance, at the mention of Maeve. Still, the Fallen did not appear to be truly insulted and a teasing smile graced her lips. “Besides, beloved, I believe it was Maeve that gave you a good time, and not vice versa.”

“Practise, Meciel, it all comes down to practise,” Harry says lazily, giving another yawn and stretching his arms above his head. Suddenly a voice broke into their conversation, making Harry start for a moment.

“Who are you talking to, Potter?” Cedric asked slowly as he walked into the tent.

Harry looked up, seeing the Seventh Year looking befuddled as he gazed around the tent, trying to see just who Harry had been bantering with. He blinked in confusion as he found nobody and eyed Harry oddly, a bemused expression on his face.

“I believe that is my cue,” Meciel said with a smile on her face and she gave Harry a mocking wave, her illusion wavering and disappearing as Harry turned to Cedric.

“Myself,” He answered half-truthfully and Cedric blinked, eying Harry with a hint of wariness on his face.

“They’re doing scores now, so...c’mon,” the Seventh Year said and backed out of the tent, still looking uncomfortable.

Harry sighed in annoyance, reluctant to leave his chair now that he had made himself comfortable. Still, he picked himself up from chair, a disgruntled frown on his face. He strode out of the tent and joined the champions in front of the judge’s podium. The others eyed him carefully but Harry ignored them as Bagman stood up, raising his hands and stilling the mutter of the audience stand.

“As you may have already heard, there was a bit of a problem during the Second Task,” He started and his eyes darted towards Harry. “After careful consultation, the judges have decided that the Second Task remained true to its spirit and therefore, will count towards the final score of the champions.”

“ Now, Fleur Delacour demonstrated excellent use of the Bubblehead Charm. However, she was attacked by Grindylows and forced to return to the surface before she was able to retrieve her hostage. We award her Twenty-Five points.”

“I deserve zero,” Fleur said, shaking her head. Her golden hair swayed over her bathing suit and Harry couldn’t help but take another look as he nodded sagely.

“Yes, you do,” He said softly, without taking his eyes off the judges, and Fleur scowled at him as Bagman cheerfully continued reciting the scores.

“Viktor Krum used an incomplete spell to transfigure himself into a shark, which was nevertheless effective, and demonstrated an advanced understanding of self-transfiguration. He returned to the surface with four minutes to spare. We award him forty points.”

Krum straightened up and bowed his head towards the judges, looking very pleased with himself. Harry rolled his eyes at his fellow Champions pomposity and made a face at Krum’s back. The only person who seemed to notice was Cedric, who looked both amused

and annoyed, but the Seventh Years attention was instantly back on Bagman as the judge continued.

“Both Cedric Diggory and Richard Banks demonstrated excellent use of the bubblehead charm and, like Viktor, returned with their hostages with four minutes to spare. We award both of them forty-four points.”

The crowd cheered as both Cedric and Richard beamed. Richard even raised his hand and gave the crowd a wave, to which the cheering intensified. Harry just groaned, rolled his eyes and shook his head with disgust at the display of showmanship. When he turned back to Bagman, he saw that the blonde-haired wizard had hesitated. A moment later, he spoke up.

“Now, Harry Potter returned well outside the time limit. Furthermore, he returned without his hostage and nursing an injury,” Bagman said carefully. The audience was silent as Bagman continued, a pleased smile playing at his lips. “However, the other champions tell us that Harry Potter was the first to arrive at the merman village and stayed behind to defend both the hostages and the other champions from attack, saving them all from certain death. Several of us feel that this deserves full marks, however,” and here he shot Karkaroff and even Dumbledore annoyed glances. “We award Harry Potter forty-two points.”

The crowd roared with applause but Harry ignored them, frowning as he mentally added in the new scores to the scores of the First Task. The audience in the stands were rising and beginning to leave, making a lot of noise as they did but Harry blocked them out as he blinked in surprise.

“So, Krum and Richard are winning on 75, Cedric is on 74, I’m on 71 and Fleur is on 54,” Harry murmured.. “Hey, I just might win this thing.”

‘Indeed,’ Meciél murmured into his mind. Around him the other champions were strolling away- all except Fleur, that is. The blonde-haired champion from Beauxbatons had hesitated and took a deep

breath, sporting an intensely uncomfortable look as she confronted him.

“Potter...Haree,” Fleur said slowly, her voice rich with her accent. She was looking at him carefully, making an effort to hide the usual disdain she felt for him as she stared into his eyes. “You saved my sister’s life. I must...thank you.”

“Okay, you spoiled French brat,” Harry said with an annoyed frown. “Let’s get this perfectly straight. I didn’t save your sister’s life.” He gestured to the backs of the other champions. “They saved your sister’s life. I was too busy having fun killing things. Lets not get all sentimental and sappy here- I really don’t do that well.”

“And by fighting, you allowed them to escape,” Fleur said fiercely, her eyes sparkling passionately. “And put yourself in more danger. You saved her, even though she wasn’t your hostage.”

Harry narrowed his eyes at her and opened his mouth to respond with a scathing comment. However, he never got a chance to retort as Fleur bent down and placed a chaste kiss on his cheek, stunning him into silence.

“Thankyou,” She said breathily, her eyes sparkling as she stared into his.

With a whirl of her golden sleet of hair, Fleur walked away, leaving Harry to stare after her in surprise. He blinked and touched his cheek, a smug smirk coming over his face as he stroked his chin.

‘She’s acting like one of those first years who believe that you are a hero,’ Meciell said and Harry could have sworn he heard disgruntlement in her voice.

“Yeah,” Harry said absently, cocking his head as he stared at her retreating back and other lower appendages. “But she has a much nicer...”

‘Arse,’ Meciél finished, not even needing to sense Harry’s thoughts to know what he was going to say. She sighed. ‘Beloved, you are hopeless. Absolutely hopeless.’

“So I notice these things,” Harry said and shrugged lightly, a cocky smile on his face.. “Sue me.”

Several hours after Harry had dived into the lake, he found himself striding through one of Hogwarts’s many darkened hallways. He was walking alone, trying to avoid both Dumbledore and the lecture on good and morals and all that crap that would follow, and the other people who wanted to know what happened under the lake.

Harry usually had no problems in bragging about his victories, but given that he had transformed into a demon with the help of a Fallen Angel and slaughtered innocent Mermen that might have been saved, he had the feeling that the Wizards, especially the Ministry of Magic, wouldn’t be too happy with him. There were two places that Harry had heard of that he never wanted to visit, the Vatican, and the Wizard Prison of Azkaban.

“Sometimes you’re more trouble than your worth,” Harry grumbled jokingly to Meciél, who followed the trail of his thoughts and throbbed with amusement.

“I know,” somebody said quietly and Harry started, swinging around with blazing rage burning in his eyes. It faded away into annoyance and Harry lowered his wand as he saw Amanda standing behind him, a smile on her face.

“Hi.” The blonde girl said cheerfully, giving Harry a small wave.

Harry sighed irritably and tucked his wand back in his coat, a scowl forming on his face. It had been such a good day of violence and mayhem- why, oh why, did this annoyingly cheerfully girl have to come and ruin it for him?

“What do you want?” He growled darkly.

“Nothing,” Amanda said defensively, walking up and standing by his side. “I just got out of the hospital wing- they put us all through tests to make sure we were really okay. By the way, Madam Pomfrey wants to have a look at your wound.”

“Tell her thanks, but not thanks. I’d rather burn in hell,” Harry said, a mocking smile on his face. “And that’s definitely more likely to happen than me walking through those hospital wing steps and into her perverted clutches. If she wants some entertainment, tell her to go talk to Dumbledore. They’ll have a lot in common.”

Harry saw Amanda roll her eyes as he turned around and started walking down the corridor and away from her. However, an instant later he could hear Amanda’s soft footsteps as she caught up with him, a brilliant and annoyingly happy smile on her face.

“So?” she murmured secretively, her face reflecting pleasure and a hint of teasing.

“So...what?” Harry asked slowly, eying Amanda darkly.

“So, I’m the one you would miss the most,” Amanda said happily. She smiled brilliantly at Harry’s look of disgust and wagged her finger in his face. “It’s true, don’t deny it.”

“I don’t think so,” Harry scoffed, waving a hand irritably through the air. “It was all about that stupid Yule Ball. Apparently they think I like you or something. That’s just...”

“Ridiculous,” Amanda helpfully supplied and Harry nodded his head vigorously.

“Exactly,” He declared with an annoyed frown. “I mean, I’d miss a good whiff of methane before I’d miss you. At least with methane I only have to smell it. I have to smell, hear and see you. That’s three times as bad.”

Amanda sighed and rolled her eyes at his comments, exasperation on her face as she glowered at him. She folded her arms over her chest and levelled a piercing glare at him.

“Would it kill you to be honest with me for once?” She demanded, irritation flickering in her eyes. “Just once, tell me the truth.”

“What?” Harry asked in confusion, eying Amanda with an irritable scowl on his face and both matching and surpassing her glare. “What the hell are you on about? You’re making less sense than usual.”

“Look, I know you don’t like me a lot,” Amanda started patiently.

“At all,” Harry broke in helpfully and Amanda sighed, rolling her eyes in annoyance.

“Fine, at all then,” she said impatiently, and then levelled at him an intent stare. Her passionate blue-grey eyes bore into his impassive green orbs. “But tell me this- can you really say that you hate me as much as you say you do?”

“Um...Yes,” Harry concluded with a definite nod and flashed her with a bright, sarcastic smile. “Yes, I can.”

“You’re a liar,” Amanda said simply, her scowl fading away and replaced with a resigned smile. “And unpleasant to be around. And cruel to other people. And disrespectful for anybody else. And selfish. And associated with a being of evil. And a general all-around bastard.”

“Yeah, its fun, isn’t it?” Harry said, shrugging his shoulders and looked at Amanda impatiently. “You’re telling me stuff I already know. Do you have a point in all of this?”

“But, I know you,” Amanda finished and Harry sighed, raising a hand to silence her.

“No you don’t,” He said darkly. “Believe me, you really don’t. Now, will you shut up? Or do I have to make you?”

“There’s good in you,” Amanda said, ignoring his comments and staring at him softly. “I can see it, even if you cant.”

“You can sense the good in me?” Harry echoed and gave a derisive snort. He rolled his eyes, giving a loud sigh of irritation and disbelief as he rounded on the girl. “This isn’t a Star Wars movie. I’m not a conflicted and tragic dark hero! I’m not going to join the light on the verge of my death- mainly because I don’t plan on dying. It may come to you as a surprise, but I actually don’t walk around in a giant refrigerator and sounding like I shoved a freaking cucumber up my arse! And believe me when I say that I am not your Father.”

“I never thought you were,” Amanda shot back stubbornly and Harry paused, a sly smile coming to his face

“Then again, with a mother likes yours...”Harry said and trailed off, a lecherous smile coming over his face.

“ Yuck!” Amanda gagged, shaking her head in disgust. “That....you....are sick.”

Still, she was smiling at him with knowing on her face and Harry shook his head, knowing that there was very little he could say or do, short of actually killing her at that very moment that would make her change her mind. For a brief moment, he entertained that thought but then shook it off. He’d be the most likely suspect, after all.

“Geez, you save somebody’s life and suddenly everybody thinks you like them or something,” Harry muttered sourly, shaking his head in disgust.

Amanda rolled her eyes as he strolled away, a small smile on her face. She watched his retreating back with something like wistfulness in her eyes before she sighed, her smile disappearing. A moment later, she turned around and started back towards the Gryffindor Tower.

The day after the Second Task found Harry lounging in the Gryffindor Common room amidst a haze of soft mutters and nervous glances. The news that Harry had practically massacred an entire village of mermen – bewitched or not- had made its way around the school and probably into the papers. If people had been in awe of his power from the First Task, the end of the Second Task heralded in a new wave of genuine fear.

To Harry, it was absolutely wonderful. Not only were people leaving him alone, but they were fearfully respectful towards him and that- to Harry - was almost as good as genuine respect.

At the present moment, Harry found himself leaning back in one of the cushiony chairs in front of the common room fire. His emerald eyes were glazed over as he stared at the thick tome on his lap, allowing Meciél to memorise entire slabs of text, before idly flipping the page every few seconds. To the students in the common-room, it was as if Harry was devouring the pages with his eyes. However, most of them were less concerned about Harry's strange reading habits and more concerned about his tendency to kill.

“How long has he been at it?” Amanda asked Hermione quietly, emerging from her dormitory and moving to stand behind the bushy-haired girl.

Hermione stiffened at Amanda's voice.

“Ten minutes,” she answered tersely, not even turning her head to stare at her former friend.

She still hadn't forgiven Amanda for the nasty slap the blonde-haired American had given her and was even outraged that Amanda hadn't apologised yet, especially after it became common knowledge that Harry had murdered an entire tribe of Mermen and proven many of Hermione's accusations right.

“Wow,” Amanda said quietly, blinking as Harry flipped another page. “He's definitely a speed-reader then.”

“If you say so,” Hermione said tightly and turned back to her homework.

Amanda stared at the back of Hermione’s head with a pained frown and it almost looked as if she was going to say something. Instead, she sighed and turned away, glancing back towards Harry once more. There was a large gap between him and the rest of the students, even the small group of First Years that liked to trail after Harry. With only a glimmer of hesitation, Amanda bit her lip and strolled over to where Harry was sitting.

“Go. Away. Barbie,” Harry said slowly, his eyes not leaving the book on his lap.

“What are you doing at the moment?” Amanda asked, ignoring Harry’s barb.

“Well, I’ll go ahead and answer the obvious,” Harry answered, flipping a page on his book. “At that moment, I was reading a book on the joys of bestiality, if you must know. At this very moment, though, I’m sitting down, breathing – Oh, now I’m turning my head and looking at you. Now, I’m frowning at you and tapping my fingers impatiently on my book and coincidentally, pretty much doing everything except what I was doing two seconds ago.”

“Harry...” Amanda started exasperatedly.

“What do you want?” Harry interrupted her quickly, his eyes glinting with annoyance. “If this is about the whole ‘Harry is Darth Vader’ thing from yesterday, no, I will not repent, no, I will not feel regret and yes, I will do your Mum.”

“I want you to help me.” Amanda cut in sharply, although a flash of aversion filled her mind at the thought of Harry ‘doing’ her Mom. That was a mental image that she could have really done without.

“You want me to what?” Harry asked in astonishment. A look of incredibility flashed over his face as he shook his head, a scornful

chuckle escaping his throat and attracting the attention of the common room.

Amanda flushed as Harry laughed in her face, and blushed harder as several of the first years from across the room joined in with their fallen hero. But as soon as Harry heard them, he stopped laughing and levelled a very pointed glare at them. The group of hero-worshiping first years, led by a pretty pigtailed brunette, immediately stopped laughing and ducked their heads as Harry turned back to Amanda.

“Why on Earth, Heaven and Hell would I want to help you?” He asked her, rolling his eyes in irritation as the smile fell off his lips. “I don’t like you, remember?”

“So you keep telling me,” Amanda remarked dryly and took a seat next to Harry, who gave a soft sigh of annoyance and slammed his book shut.

“Why are you sitting there?” Harry asked her coldly, eying her with the beginnings of anger.

“I’m not leaving until you agree to help me,” Amanda said stubbornly and folded her arms across her chest.

“I could make you leave,” Harry promised quietly and darkness glittered in his icy green eyes. “And it would require little effort on my part.”

“I’m sure you could,” Amanda retorted, although a flash of nervousness ran through her and she eyed Harry carefully, as if she wasn’t sure on just how far she could push him. “But I’m pretty sure that you won’t. Besides, I think you’ll want to help me. After all, you don’t offer a coin to everybody.”

“I see,” Harry said softly and glanced around the common room, noticing that all eyes were surreptitiously glancing at both him and Amanda. He narrowed his eyes and with a sudden flash of movement, whipped his wand out.

Amanda flinched, her entire body going icy cold as her eyes widened with fear. However, instead of cursing her, Harry flicked his wand through the air and barked out an incantation. There was a sudden glimmer of sparkling light and suddenly most of the room winced, clapping their ears in pain. Harry let a satisfied smile cross his face and put his wand away, turning back to Amanda.

“What did you do?” Amanda murmured, staring around the room with an impressed expression on her face. Although she could see many mouths moving, accompanied by angry scowls, she couldn’t hear a thing. She watched as another round of winces shot through the room, much to Harry’s amusement.

“A privacy spell, of sorts,” Harry said with a pleased smile. “If they try to listen to our conversation, they get a painful dose of loud, unrecognisable noise. A bit like rap music, really.”

“Oh,” Amanda said quietly. She turned her head back to Harry, only to find him staring at her with intent green eyes, his displeasure reflected on his face.

“Dumbledore told me that you could be trusted to keep your mouth shut,” Harry said softly, coldly. “As much as I dislike the guy, I respect him, so I believed him. But here you are, flapping your mouth open about coins. Were you dropped on the head as a baby or are you just that stupid?”

“I’m just surprised that you respect somebody,” Amanda said, blinking in surprise. “And that last little quip- it could have been done better, you know.”

“Why go for long and complicated when the simple sayings work best?” Harry said, shrugging carelessly. The cold glint in his eyes hadn’t left. “And Dumbledore is not only powerful, but he hasn’t tried to kill me yet. Hence, the respect.”

“Ah,” Amanda uttered in what she hoped was a nonchalant tone. She avoided Harry’s gaze and ducked her head, studying her crimson robes with apparent interest.

“So, you want a coin,” Harry murmured softly, staring at Amanda was renewed interest. “You’d make a pretty pathetic host, you know, although you are the daughter of a Knight- that has to mean something.” He stopped and cocked his head to the side, listening to something that Amanda couldn’t hear. “Meciel agrees with me. She says that your attitude is all wrong, that you have no real power, and that you’re a very ugly person with hair like serpents and a face like a cat’s arse.”

“Excuse me?” Amanda asked, her mouth falling open in shock as she stared at Harry indigently. “You tell Meciel that I don’t want one of the stupid coins, and that I have plenty of power, and that I have very nice hair and a beautiful face, thank you!”

“Noted,” Harry remarked dryly, but then frowned. “You don’t want a coin?”

“No,” Amanda snapped quickly.

“Then why am I talking to you?” Harry asked her with an annoyed scowl on his face, narrowing his eyes. He made a move for his wand but Amanda stopped him, a determined expression on her face.

“I want you to teach me,” She declared and stared at Harry with a challenging expression on her face, almost daring him to refuse.

“Well, when a boy meets a girl and wants to jump into her panties, he usually inserts his...” Harry started, but broke off as he saw the serious expression on Amanda’s face. “You’re serious, aren’t you?”

“Absolutely,” Amanda said and felt a twinge of a smile at the sigh of Harry’s incredulous expression.

“What could you, pure maiden of the Heavens, ever learn from me, the accursed demon boy of the night?” Harry asked scornfully, before a thoughtful expression came over his face. “Accursed demon boy of the night...Hmm, I’ve got to remember that one.”

“You stole that off Daniel,” Amanda snorted, shaking her head, and Harry blinked.

“Who?”

“My brother,” Amanda said, rolling her eyes. “He called you that when you first met him. You said that he watched too much TV...what, you can’t remember?”

“Daniel, Daniel,” Harry mused thoughtfully, tapping his chin with his finger. “Is he the one with the face that looks like a pack of baboons belted the crap out of him with their own piles of crap?”

Amanda stared at him, rolled her eyes and decided that this conversation was not going to lead anywhere.

“I want you to teach me magic,” Amanda redirected firmly, staring Harry down with challenging blue eyes.

“Go ask a Professor,” Harry snorted and turned back to his book, apparently disinterested with the conversation.

“I’ve already asked Professor Moody,” Amanda broke in quickly, a bitter tone entering her voice as she continued. “He told me that constant vigilance was more important than any one spell. I don’t know anybody else who could teach me what I want to know and Molly won’t do it, she thinks I’m too young. Tell that to the people who’ve tried to kill me.”

“Won’t teach you what you want to know,” Harry murmured softly and looked up at her, a speculative gleam in his eyes. “Now, what is that meant to mean?”

“Look,” Amanda begun, frustration welling up within her. “I’ve had it with always needing to be rescued by other people. I want to learn how to defend myself and you, well; you seem to be able to hold yourself in a fight. Nobody else will help me learn what I need to know, so I’m asking you.”

“I see,” Harry said slowly, eying Amanda with a strange expression on his face. For a moment, Amanda thought that he almost looked gleeful as he stared at her. “Do you know exactly what you’re asking me to teach you?”

“No, I don’t mean Dark Magic,” Amanda said quickly, almost horrified by the suggestion. “I just....just want to know how to defend myself. Legally, I mean.”

“But of course,” Harry said quietly, pleasantly, an odd little smile on his face. “Don’t we all?”

“So, you’ll help me?” Amanda blinked, surprise running through her mind.

Harry tilted his head, staring at her oddly with a glint in his cold green eyes. Amanda almost shivered at the look he gave her, which seemed to bore right into her body, and was relieved when he glanced back down at his book, an expression of boredom coming over his face.

“Okay then,” Harry said grumpily, almost the glint in his eyes remained. “After all, you’re the Daughter of a Knight. How could I refuse?”

“Really?” asked Amanda, a beaming smile coming over her face as gratitude washed over her.

“I said yes,” Harry remarked and reached into his clothes, pulling out his wand. “Just don’t tell anybody, or else I’ll get every retard from here to Australia wanting my help.”

He flicked his wand and Amanda watched as the air rippled, the spell Harry had put up dispelling in a soft wave of almost unnoticeable sparks. Instantly, the low buzz of the chatter in the common room hit her ears, just as the portrait opened and Professor McGonagall walked in.

Amanda watched curiously as McGonagall spotted Harry and strode over, a stern and almost haughty expression on her face.

“Mr Potter,” She began severely. “Headmaster Dumbledore wishes to speak with you, immediately.”

“That’s nice,” Harry said distractedly, staring down at his book. “I’ve always wanted to speak to the Easter Bunny, frankly. Just how does a rabbit manage to lay eggs? I mean, the mechanics of it must be mind-boggling.”

“ Mr Potter,” McGonagall begun, almost wearily. “Professor Dumbledore was most insistent that he talk to you.”

“ Well, he can come down here if he wants,” Harry remarked flippantly. “I’m all comfortable now.”

McGonagall’s nostrils flared and her cheeks paled. For a moment, Amanda thought that she would attack Harry- she was certainly gripping her wand tightly in her hand.

“ Mr Potter, you will come with me if I have to force you too,” McGonagall began firmly, eying Harry with intense disapproval.

“You could try,” Harry began wittily, smiling cockily at McGonagall.

“Or if Professor Dumbledore himself has to come down and force you to his office,” McGonagall finished, breathing heavily through her flared nostrils.

Harry’s smile disappeared and for a moment Amanda though she saw something like wariness splash over his face. The young

Denarian, however, composed himself in a flash and gave McGonagall a cocky smile.

“Well, I do need to head to the little girls room,” Harry said thoughtfully, standing up and idly waving his wand. The book, in the process of falling to the ground, shot through the common and up into the Fourth Year dormitories.

“Little girl’s room?” McGonagall asked, raising a prim eyebrow. “Is there something you’re not telling us, Mr Potter?”

“Yeah, I’m a pervert,” Harry remarked and flashed a cheeky grin. He gave McGonagall a mocking bow and then strode out of the Common Room without another word.

“I swear, the only person that that boy will even acknowledge is Professor Dumbledore,” McGonagall muttered to herself, rubbing the bridge of her nose wearily.

“I think he respects Dumbledore for his power,” Amanda offered and McGonagall glanced at her, throwing her a tired smile. “Or fears him for his power.”

“Several wizards fear Dumbledore for his power, You-Know-Who being the utmost,” The Transfiguration Professor said, sighing and shaking her head in resignation. “Good day, Ms Carpenter.”

“A little fear isn’t too bad,” Amanda muttered under her breath as she watched McGonagall leave the Common Room.

Harry was sitting in Dumbledore’s office, his posture stiff and his eyes narrowed as he stared over Dumbledore’s desk, almost glaring at the elderly man. He brushed off the pointed looks he was receiving from the moving portraits that lined the walls and ignored the queer magical objects on the large shelves. In the corner lay a large black dog, with shaggy fur and haunted blue eyes. Harry ignored it for the most part, although he had made sure to take the seat the furthest away from the huge beast.

From behind the desk, Dumbledore met his eyes steadily, his hard blue gaze boring down into Harry's. It was only due to the presence of Meciél that Harry kept his eyes centred on Dumbledore, confident in her ability to protect his mind.

"Say that again," Harry ordered curtly, anger brewing in his emerald eyes.

"I said, Mr Potter, that you performed a great evil yesterday," Dumbledore said quietly, steeping his fingers together and exhaling softly. "You have committed murder, Harry, and taken life when you could have spared it. More importantly, you have taken the life of the innocent. The mermen were as much victims as you were."

"They tried to kill me and they were enthralled!" Harry protested angrily, scowl on his face. "You know that theirs minds would never have recovered- they would have turned psychotic and attacked, like, the children and stuff. I did you a service. Besides, it isn't murder if they have weapons, Dumbledore. Even you..."

"They were bewitched, Harry," Dumbledore broke in calmly, but there was something off in his voice and Harry immediately shut up. "They were not responsible for their actions. I understand that you must have been under a lot of pressure and you needed to do all you could in order to ensure the survival of the hostages, and of yourself."

"If you understand then why are you yelling at me?" Harry snapped irritably, crossing his arms over his chest petulantly. The dog exhaled loudly, almost as if it was snorting in amusement, and Harry gave it a strange look.

'Very mature, beloved,' Meciél noted dryly. 'Now all you have to do is drink the Polyjuice potion and your illusion as a young, crying child will be complete.'

'That's not helping, Meciél.'

"I am not yelling at you," Dumbledore said softly, but calmly, and a polite smile came over his face. "I am merely expressing my

disappointment to you in a calm, reasonable manner- as the wise often try to do.”

Harry made a scoffing noise and leant back in his chair. Dumbledore may have said that he was disappointed and although he radiated nothing else but serenity and calmness, Harry could sense a jolt of anger running through the Headmaster and rolled his eyes. Trust Dumbledore to wear a benign smile of politeness while reprimanding a demonic teenager for the mass-murder of an entire village of sentient creatures.

“What I find most disappointing, though, is that you sit here in front of me with absolutely no remorse for what you have done,” Dumbledore said softly, staring at Harry with disappointed eyes.

If Harry had been a normal student, he would have felt the first twinges of guilt at both the statement and Dumbledore’s manner. However, he merely raised an eyebrow and shrugged his shoulders carelessly.

“These things happen,” Harry said simply. His words echoed in the Headmaster’s office and Dumbledore shook his head wearily, his blue eyes flicking imperceptibly towards the dog.

“Twenty seven,” Dumbledore said quietly, staring at Harry intently with his pale blue eyes. “That is the number of children you tore apart. I supervised the Ministry investigation myself- I returned to the scene of the attack – I saw the broken bodies of the mermen. You didn’t murder them, Harry, you slaughtered them like animals.”

“Ministry Investigation?” Harry said quickly, straightening up in his chair and leaning forward. “Am I in going to get into trouble over this?”

Dumbledore stared at him with an expression of cool politeness and for a moment, Harry suddenly got the feeling that the man was absolutely disgusted with him. Nevertheless, he maintained eye contact with Dumbledore and awaited his answer.

“No, Harry,” Dumbledore said softly. “You are not in any legal trouble. The Ministry does not have the right to intervene in Tournament business unless in extreme cases, and they do not perceive the slaughter of over one-hundred sentient beings as ‘extreme’ .”

“Well, to be fair, it’s not as if they were even human, Dumbledore,” Harry started, but stopped as a look of utter coldness washed over Dumbledore’s face. Fear shot through him and he gripped the arms of his chair tightly.

The air around Dumbledore seemed to be charged with energy and there was a terrible coldness and fury radiating from Dumbledore’s face. For an instant, Dumbledore looked more horrible and terrifying than Harry had ever seen him before. However, in an instant it had all vanished as Dumbledore reigned himself under control and gave Harry a small, pleasant and decidedly-fake smile.

“I had not perceived you as a bigot, Harry,” Dumbledore said quietly. “And the notion that you may be one greatly disturbs me. The mermen were as human as you and I. They had real emotions, real lives, real dreams, and real love. They had families of their own to care for, jobs to work at and houses to come home to. I had known many of them for decades- they did not deserve this fate.”

Harry rolled his eyes, mainly as an excuse to break Dumbledore’s intent gaze, and stood up. He had finally had enough of Dumbledore’s penetrating stare, and he was feeling uneasy after Dumbledore’s flash of power. It was obvious that Dumbledore was feeling a personal loss at the moment and Harry didn’t want to get caught in the middle of it. He turned for the door.

“I’m afraid that our conversation isn’t over, Harry,” Dumbledore said.

From the corner of his eye, Harry saw a flash of movement from the old man- a gnarled hand reaching in brightly-coloured robes and pulling out a wand. Hellfire flared in his mind, dark magic pouring into his wand, a deadly curse on his lips as the moment that Harry had feared loomed close- Dumbledore’s betrayal. In a single reflexive

movement, Harry whipped out his own wand from beneath his coat and spun around, just as Dumbledore's spell caused the door to shut loudly behind him.

Unfortunately, Harry registered this just as he sent a blast of dark magic through his wand. Oily smoke curdled off the runes as a glimmer of silver light formed in the shape of an arrowhead shot towards Dumbledore. Harry's eyes widened and shock started to plaster on his features. Every nerve in his body throbbed- he had just attacked the most powerful person in the castle.

In the second before death would have claimed him, Dumbledore's wand blurred and suddenly a huge roaring noise stuck Harry's ears. Harry wasn't even able to cast a single shield spell as he was knocked back by the sheer concussive blast of that soundwave. An intense golden flash of light filled the room, shattering Harry's curse mere centimetres from the old man's face and sweeping towards him. The floor rumbled as Harry squeezed his eyes shut, his heart pounding in his veins. His wand was suddenly yanked out of his hand and something struck Harry in the stomach, driving the air from his lungs. He doubled over and gave a startled cry of pain, which was lost in the dying echoes of the noise. The flash of light pushed and pulled at his body, sending him spinning through the air, dizzy and lost. Suddenly Harry felt the golden light strike at him one last time and he was blasted backwards, slamming into the door and landing in a dishevelled heap of bruised limbs.

The light faded and Harry stared up at Dumbledore with shock, his cold eyes glinting both in anger and fear. Hellfire pounded in his head and he took in Dumbledore, the foreboding wizard looming over his desk with both his own wand and Harry's wand in his hand. There was a trace of satisfaction in the older man's eyes as stared down at Harry's, his gnarled hands levelling the wands at Harry's head. There was no time to transform; no spell Harry could use quickly enough, no weapon in his arsenal that powerful.

Dumbledore had Harry at his mercy – and he could kill the Denarian at anytime now. Harry let Hellfire roar in his veins, preparing to transform in an instant. However, fortunately for Harry, whatever satisfaction Dumbledore had received seemed to have disappeared

an instant later and regret filled the old man's eyes. He lowered the wand, looking older and frailer than ever before.

Harry didn't take much notice of Dumbledore's facial expressions and as soon as the wand had been lowered, he staggered up off the ground, looking both shocked and angry. Harry stared at Dumbledore, breathing harshly as he clenched his fists.

"Harry, I..." Dumbledore began but Harry ignored him as he reached out his hand. Unseen magic pulsed through the air and although Dumbledore could have easily deflected it, he didn't. Harry's wand, the wand clasped in Dumbledore's hand, shot through the air and into Harry's hand.

"Please, Harry..." Dumbledore tried again, this time almost pleadingly.

Harry kept his eyes on him, the fear pounding in his heart quickly being replaced with anger and hatred. He curled his lip as he kept his wand levelled at Dumbledore, his other hand fumbling at the doorknob behind him.

"Open this door or I will kill you," Harry promised with a snarl, dark power flaring up in his eye. He stared Dumbledore down, his eyes reflecting the truthfulness of his rather bold statement. Had the man made a threatening move, Harry would have transformed and seen how Dumbledore liked a two-ton Bone Wrym charging at him.

Perhaps Dumbledore could see Harry's state of mind or perhaps he knew that this conversation wasn't going anywhere. Either way, Dumbledore sighed wearily but flicked his wand and the door behind Harry made a clicking noise. The aged Headmaster did nothing as Harry quickly left his office without saying another word. With a regretful sigh, Dumbledore bowed his head and returned to his seat. He lowered himself into his armchair and with a soft sigh, turned to his blazing fireplace.

"Now, do you see why I have instructed you to stay away?" Dumbledore asked wearily.

The dog in the corner let out a pitiful whining noise, pressing its ears flat on its head and standing up.

“Every man, woman and child of an entire village,” Dumbledore sighed wearily and absently stroked his beard. “I let my emotions get the better of me. I should not have disarmed him in that fashion. He will not want to see me for quite some time now. I do not think I will be able to introduce the two of you any time soon.”

The dog then barked- an angry and defiant noise. It bared its teeth but a single stern look from Dumbledore made it bow its head, the anger leaving its eyes. It whined again and sunk back down, putting its giant head between its legs and letting its tongue flop out.

“I am sorry, Sirius,” Dumbledore apologised softly, steeping his fingers together. “However, I believe your presence will be detrimental to my efforts. I do not believe he will like your presence. I do not believe he likes anybody.”

The dog whined again as Dumbledore absently waved his wand, conjuring a cup of tea, complete with saucer and spoon. The old man took a sip, allowing the heated liquid to warm his stomach, and stroked his beard thoughtfully. Together, Dumbledore and the huge black-furred dog stared into the fire, each lost in their own thoughts.

Harry stormed through the corridor with a furious scowl on his face, moving away from the Headmaster’s office as fast as he could. His anger was perceptible to the students he passed and they shrunk away from his burning hot gaze and livid expression.

‘Really, beloved, this is your fault,’ Meciél noted, her voice devoid of sympathy.

‘Meciél...’ Harry started in a mixture of exasperation and anger.

‘I’m just saying that you could have handled that better,’ Meciél said and a faint note of disapproval clouded her voice. ‘You could have handled that much better.’

“Do you think?” Harry snapped loudly, drawing the attention of two third years. They stared at him oddly, but Harry merely glared at them. “Piss off!” He snarled, and the two third years quickly scampered down the hallway.

‘I admire your subtlety, beloved,’ Meciél murmured and Harry scowled.

‘Could you give it a break?’ Harry demanded, his robes whipping behind him as he turned a corner. ‘Alright, I get it. I stuffed up. But he didn’t kill me, so I guess everything’s all right.’

‘You were overzealous, beloved,’ Meciél said, a touch irritably. ‘And whatever chances that you may have had of procuring Dumbledore as an ally have been dashed.’

‘You know what, Meciél, you can just shut up,’ Harry demanded, a fierce scowl on his face. When he felt Meciél stirring to speak again, the scowl deepened. ‘I mean it. Unless you have something useful to say that might help me, don’t talk.’

Harry felt a sharp flash of anger burst out from Meciél’s blazing presence but she complied with his order and sunk into the unused parts of his mind, until Harry could barely sense her. Stung and full of rage, Harry stalked forward, his green eyes glinting with anger.

For the first time, Harry felt truly scared of Dumbledore and of what the man could do to him, and he hated the feeling. He hated the helplessness of his situation, that Dumbledore could come after him at any time while Harry was still bound to the Goblet, and hence, the castle. Most of all, he hated being vulnerable. It was something that Harry had vowed to never feel again after he had escaped the Dursley’s.

“Dammit!” Harry exploded angrily. He lashed out with his foot, striking one of the gleaming suits of armour. It fell to the ground with a crash, which echoed in the large and empty hallway. Harry scowled

at the fallen heap of metal, his wand in hand, and he let out a sigh. "I need to blow something up."

"Harry! Hey Harry!" Somebody called out loudly, interrupting Harry from his musings.

Harry whirled around with an enraged scowl on his face, his anger still flaring in his veins. His rage dissipated and annoyance flickered over his face as he saw Amanda trotting quickly towards him. Her face flickered with hesitancy as she saw his expression but she steeled herself and continued.

"I was wondering about those lessons," Amanda said quickly, blowing a few blonde bangs out of her eyes. "You know how you said..."

"Fine," Harry interrupted abruptly, a grim smile on his face. "In fact, we'll start right now. Follow me."

"What?" Amanda blurted out, looking astonished, but Harry had already turned around and was walking away from her. With a confused yet pleased smile, Amanda heaved a soft sigh at Harry's manners and quickly hurried after him.

"Where are we?" Amanda asked as Harry led her into a small and seemingly ruined classroom. She blinked at the sight of the battered and splintered tables and the scorched floor and turned to Harry with a puzzled expression on her face.

"This is where I train," Harry replied shortly, a strange smile on his face. He gazed around the room, his eyes narrow with speculation before he gave a short, decisive nod and turned back to the blonde-haired girl, a disturbing gleam in his eyes. "Now, Duel me."

"What?" Amanda uttered, blinking in surprise and giving a nervous laugh. "What are you on about, Harry?"

“You want me to teach you,” Harry explained impatiently, gripping his wand tightly and eying Amanda with a dangerous glint in his eyes. “So I need to know where you’re at. Hence, duel me.”

“But...” Amanda started.

“You can either start casting spells at me or I can wipe the floor with your pretty little face,” Harry interrupted darkly, faint traces of anger twisting his face. “You begged me to help you. Here I am. So do what I fucking tell you to do. Duel me. Now.”

Amanda flinched at his hostile tone and took a startled step backwards, staring at Harry with a hurt expression on her face. Despite all of Harry’s scathing comments, he had never spoken to her like this before. For a moment, Amanda considered leaving but one look at Harry’s stony face caused a swell of determination to rise within her and she squared her shoulders stubbornly, raising her wand and flinging out her arm.

“Expelliarm-“ She started, but Harry whipped his wand up and parried it almost instantly. Amanda gave a cry of pain as the backlash struck her in the face, a stinging slap more than anything, but enough to startle her and make her stagger back.

She stared at Harry in shock, the Denarian wearing a mocking smile as he stared down at her. His wand hung loosely by his side and Amanda felt a tinge of anger at how utterly easy he had blocked her. She stepped forward, her wand whipping up and her eyes narrowing at the challenge Harry presented.

“Tant-“ She began quickly, but Harry parried the curse once more and again she stumbled, receiving a stinging slap to her hand this time. She almost dropped her wand but managed to grab onto it at the last moment.

“I think I’m outclassed here,” Amanda muttered to herself, watching Harry warily and ready to jump aside if he cast a spell at her. Amanda had never really had a chance to exert her duelling and casting skills

outside her Defence against the Dark Arts classes, both here at Hogwarts and at Salem. Her spell knowledge was above average for her year level, but it was nothing spectacular, which was why she had asked Harry for help in the first place.

“No kidding,” Harry said dryly, watching Amanda with dark amusement. “If I wanted you dead, there’d be very little you could do to stop me.”

“Well, I could- Everbero!” Amanda cried. Harry’s wand flew up and a flash of light burst from the tip. Amanda’s hazy orange streak of light honed in on the tip of Harry’s wand and ricocheted to the left, striking one of the ruined heaps of wood. The wood was sent clattering aside as Amanda flicked her wand again, her hair flying around her shoulders.

“Ventosus!” She cried out. A rush of wind gathered around her body and blasted towards Harry, who swiped his wand through the air. The wind suddenly roared and sprung back towards Amanda, whose eyes widened as she cried out “Protego!” and shielded herself from her own spell with a glimmering arc of protective magic.

“Stupefy!” Amanda mustered and a streak of crimson light escaped her wand, soaring towards Harry, who raised his wand and levelled it at Amanda.

Although he said no words, a startling flash of white light burst from the tip of his wand and Amanda suddenly gave a cry of shock as something slammed into her face. Pain flittered across her eyes as she fell to the ground, her wand clattering from her hand, while the crimson streak of light exploded with a soft pop and a shower of yellow sparks.

Amanda blinked, her eyes watering with rapidly diminishing pain, and stared up as Harry loomed above her. His wand was levelled at her head and his eyes were cold. For a single instant, Amanda quivered in fear, her nerves tumbling with anxiety and her chest heaving as she took in a deep breath. Finally, Harry lowered his wand.

“Well, that wasn’t as pathetic as I thought it would be,” Harry admitted grudgingly, but he was quick to make sure that Amanda received no praise. “Of course, that still puts you on the level of a retarded and crippled monkey.”

“Gee, thanks,” Amanda muttered as she clambered up, clutching her wand in her hand.

“That last spell, the stunning charm,” Harry said, idly scratching his chin. “It’s pretty advanced magic for a student, sure- a basic Auror spell, I think- but it’s one of the worst spells to use in an ongoing fight. The countercharm is easy to use and it can be used by pretty much anyone, including the enemies that are still up and running. Trust me, there’s nothing like an opponent getting back up once you’ve hit him to put a twist in your tampon.”

“Right,” Amanda uttered slowly, but she was paying close attention to Harry as he strode across the room and levelled his wand at one of the few tables that had not been reduced into a pile of scrap wood.

“Now, watch this,” Harry instructed and gave his wand a short, sharp jerky moment. “Abhorreo!”

A flash of blue light burst out from the tip of his wand and struck the desk. The desk clattered and shuddered but did little else as Harry turned back to Amanda. “It’s a basic percussion curse, a spell that vibrates the internal organs. A well-cast percussion curse can incapacitate your opponent and there’s no immediate countercharm - the human body doesn’t like it when more than one organ decides to start beating. It’s a basic dark arts curse and a good spell for beginners, since it doesn’t need a lot of power and there are no special requirements.”

“Special requirements?” Amanda asked.

“Some spells need a lot of powerful emotion behind them to work their best,” Harry explained, smiling grimly. “In some cases, the more emotion, the more powerful your spell will be. Hatred, lust, the need

for revenge, or just pure sadism- they all work well with the advanced Dark Arts.”

“Ah,” Amanda uttered softly, staring at Harry carefully. “And...you can do all them.”

“I have a Fallen Angel in my head who, after thousands of years, is still acting like she’s on PMS when she talks about God,” Harry snorted, shaking his head and rolling his eyes. He felt a tinge of indignation from Meciél, but true to her word, the Fallen’s presence vanished into the depths of his mind. “I have plenty of negative emotion within me.”

“That’s not nice,” Amanda frowned, before she blinked as she realised that she had just defended Meciél. “I mean...oh, you know what I mean.”

“You like the anti-feminist slurs? Meciél doesn’t, which is why I’m using them,” Harry remarked, a pleased smile on his face.

“Oh?” Amanda uttered curiously.

“We’re having a little tiff right now,” Harry admitted and rolled his eyes. “Apparently I shouldn’t have tried to kill Dumbledore. She’s being all bitchy about it.”

“What?” Amanda exclaimed, staring at Harry with wide eyes. “You did what?”

“Never mind,” Harry interrupted her quickly, raising a hand with a pained expression on his face. “Just...just do the spell.”

“I dunno,” Amanda muttered uneasily. “I said I didn’t want to perform dark magic.”

“Oh, come on,” Harry scoffed. “This isn’t real dark magic. It’s a curse, just like a stunning charm, except it’s a little more permanent.”

“Could it be used to kill people?” Amanda asked with narrowed eyes, staring at Harry shrewdly.

“Well, it depends,” Harry said, frowning. “It could be lethal on small children and the elderly, and probably on muggles. It depends on how well you cast it. Really, a well-cast percussion curse could kill a wizard just as quickly as a killing curse. “

“What?” Amanda exclaimed, shaking her head and lowering her wand. “I am not casting this spell, Harry!”

“Oh, relax, I doubt you have the power to do that,” Harry said, waving away Amanda’s protests. He frowned as a thought occurred to him. “Actually, you could probably kill small children, so if you’re ever in a tantrum, well, you have an outlet now.”

“Harry!” Amanda exclaimed, looking scandalised. “That’s not funny and you know it!”

“Will you do the spell?” Harry exclaimed in irritation.

“Look, I just...” Amanda started, but stopped and gulped as Harry’s face changed from irritated to decidedly dangerous.

“You came to me, Amanda- you practically begged me, and now you don’t want my help anymore?” Harry said softly, traces of anger in his voice. His face was stone cold and his eyes were hard. “If that’s the case, then get out. If not, then cast the fucking spell,

Amanda flinched and swallowed nervously. A look of resignation flashed in her blue eyes and she turned back to the desk, raising her wand and levelling it forward.

“Abhorreo!” She cried out. There was a weak flash of blue light but nothing else happened. Amanda blinked as the desk remained perfectly still and Harry sighed, rolling his eyes.

“Great,” He muttered sarcastically. He walked up to Amanda and twisted her wrist, almost painfully, into the right position. “Swing to the left, not to the right. Try it again.”

After ten or so minutes of practise, Amanda took a deep breath and flicked her wand towards the desk.

“Abhorreo!” She cried out. A considerably stronger flash of blue light burst from her wand and struck the desk, which shuddered as the magic seeped into it, shaking almost as hard as when Harry had done it.

Amanda turned to Harry, a beaming smile on her face as pride washed over her face. Harry merely raised an eyebrow at her as she grinned at him, twirling her wand in her hand.

“I did it,” She crowed victoriously.

“Well,” Harry drawled, not looking impressed. “It looks like the little goody-goody might become someone a little less helpless one day.”

“Coming from you, I’ll take that as a compliment,” Amanda said, still grinning as the pleasure of success remained with her. She ran a hand through her long blonde hair and turned back to the desk, flicking her wand and causing it to give a loud shudder one more.

“Yeah, whatever,” Harry muttered, shaking his head. “Anyway, that’s enough for today. For homework, you have to cast the curse on fifty small children. I expect their corpses on my desk in the morning.”

“What, you’re going?” Amanda blurted out, looking crestfallen. “But I’m still up for it! I’m not totally worn out!”

“Maybe,” Harry said and shrugged lazily. “But I’m bored now.”

“Oh,” Amanda said as he left the room. She stared at the empty doorway for a few more seconds before turning back to the desk and flourishing her wand as she began to practise once more. “Abhorreo!”

looming up ahead and in only a week, Harry would be facing the other champions for the last time. Although he publicly scoffed the tournament at every chance he got, privately, he was looking forward to his victory. A bag of gold would do him good. He was confident in his victory, especially considering the training he knew that the other champions had, but Harry still took the time to train- focussing on both swordplay and spellwork. However, every so often he found himself tutoring Amanda.

Although Harry had, at first, taken the job on the off chance that Amanda might sink into the Dark Arts- which would have made great gloating material the next time he saw one of the Knights- as time went on, Harry had to admit to himself that having an attractive girl falling over herself to learn from him was a great ego booster. Plus, Harry could torment her as much as he wanted and as long as it was in the name of 'education' then Amanda would usually go along with it. This was why Harry found himself wasting a Saturday afternoon with Amanda instead of sleeping in or lazing around.

In the shattered and ruined classroom, amongst the wooden heaps of splintered wood and, more recently, scraps of plate-mail armour. At the moment Harry was seated in one of the few standing chairs left in the room, watching Amanda with a bored expression as she swished her wand in a whip-like movement. Only the gleam in his eyes betrayed his true interest as Amanda brought her wand down.

"Plecto!" She cried out. A whip-like crack filled the air and a suit of armour at the other end of the classroom rocked back underneath a powerful blow, tumbling to the ground in a thundering clash of metal against metal.

"Not bad," Harry said lazily, staring at the collapsed pile of armour with an unimpressed look on his face. "Not good either. I do have to congratulate you though. In a duel between you and a rabid squirrel, you'd come a close second."

"Oh, shut it," Amanda grunted, a sour expression on her face. Harry suppressed a smirk at her grumpy face as Amanda continued, staring

at Harry with something like suspicion on her face. "I still don't know about this spell. I think a curse that whips somebody is definitely dark magic."

"Oh please," Harry scoffed, dismissing Amanda's concerns with ease. "This is basically a slightly more painful disarming charm, nothing more, and it's perfectly legal. Do this on an opponents arm and you'll see if he can hold onto his wand properly."

"Yeah, well," Amanda muttered, although she looked a little less concerned. "I still think you could really hurt somebody with this."

"Oh, don't be a complete ditz," Harry scoffed, rolling his eyes irritably. "Of course you could. Back in the 1787 Duelling Tournament of Orleans, one of the duellers used this spell and caught his opponent right in the eye. Tore it right out- the other guy's face was mangled up and everything."

"Really?" Amanda asked, looking both fascinated and repulsed.

"Oh yeah," Harry said, a slight chuckle in his voice.

There was a moment of silence and Amanda lowered her wand, tucking it into her robe and fidgeting under Harry's gaze.

"Was there something else you wanted?" Harry asked slowly. "A 'congratulations'? A sack of gold? A new face, perchance?"

"Do you mind if I ask you a question?" Amanda inquired carefully, blowing her bangs out of her eyes.

"Depends," Harry said. "If it's moralistic and ethical and all that boring crap, then I don't want to hear it."

"What's this about a demonic form I always hear about?" Amanda asked curiously, her light blue eyes staring at Harry inquisitively.

“Well, it’s a form,” Harry supplied helpfully, leaning back in his chair and putting his hands behind his head. “And it’s demonic. Hence, a demonic form.”

“Wow,” Amanda uttered sarcastically, rolling her eyes. “That was really enlightening. Thank you Harry,

“Brat, don’t even try sarcasm unless you’re good at it,” Harry retorted sharply, but his voice was more amused than angry as he continued, answering her question. “All Denarians have an alternate form that they can transform into. It’s sort of like an animagus transformation, except it’s an outer reflection of our darkness and potential. It depends on the amount of power both the host and the Fallen have. The more power, the more dangerous the form will be.”

“Er...cool,” Amanda said, blinking slowly. She stared at Harry carefully. “What’s your form?”

“A bone wrym,” Harry answered and Amanda frowned in puzzlement.

“I’ve never heard of it before,” she admitted. “Although, isn’t a wrym like a dragon?”

“I would be surprised if you had,” Harry remarked. “No, not surprised, more like totally and utterly flabbergasted. Astonished, gobsmacked, incredulous, dumbfounded, and so forth.”

“Er...” Meciél trailed off, staring at Harry strangely. “What?”

“Meciél is like a living thesaurus,” Harry explained, a glint of amusement in his eyes. “Besides, you’re blonde. Your natural predisposition is to be stupid. “

“That’s so sexist,” Amanda scolded and Harry smirked.

“I know,” Harry said, looking very pleased with himself. “I’m trying sexism on for now, I move to racism next week.”

Amanda sighed wearily and just dropped it. Her experience with Harry told her that he could have continued doing this all day. Really, he could be so petty sometimes.

“So...bone wrym?” She prompted.

“Well, you weren’t that off,” Harry admitted grudgingly. “It’s related to the dragon species. It was a creature that existed about thirty million years ago.” He scratched his head as Amanda leaned forward expectantly. “It died out, along with a whole lot of other species, before the dawn of man. Most of the upper echelons of the Fallen use demonic forms from that era.”

“Why?”

“Well, there were some pretty nasty creatures back then,” Harry said, shrugging his shoulders. Coldness glinted in his eyes for a moment as he continued. “Nicodemus’ demonic form, for instance, was a creature that existed a few thousand years before the Bone Wrym. It was a creature of pure energy that used to live in ice caps, sucking in the essence of the creatures it fed upon. Sort of like an ancestor of the Dementors.”

“Would a Patronus Charm have hurt it?” Amanda asked curiously. “Nicodemus’ form, I mean.”

“Maybe,” Harry admitted and shrugged. “I can’t pull one of those off, so I never found out. Doesn’t matter anyway, he’s dead now.”

“So, these creatures,” Amanda said thoughtfully, her face scrunched up in thought. “Were they dinosaurs or something?”

“Dinosaurs got themselves wiped out sixty-five millions years ago,” Harry remarked and sighed irritably. “Look, humans, as a civilisation, have been around for, what? A hundred thousand years? That’s a sixty-four million and a lot left over years between dinosaurs and man. There’s a lot of species that evolved, thrived, and then died out, and quite a few of them were magical in nature.”

“Wand Magic or True Magic?” Amanda countered, feeling quite pleased with her question.

“Neither,” Harry countered and frowned. “I have no idea what it’s called now. It became obsolete, so most of the creatures that used it died out. Or so I’m told. Meciell said she could teach me some of it, but it’s hard to master and pretty much useless in this day and age. I mean, I can summon fire with a flick of my wand and a single word with Wand Magic. Using that type of magic, it would take me half an hour and chanting in a language that the human throat is not capable of reproducing to make the same type of fire.”

“I thought ancient magic was meant to be powerful,” Amanda mused thoughtfully.

“Ancient magic is what it’s called, ancient, old, mostly archaic,” Harry disagreed animatedly. “Sure, some of it can be potent and there are some vestiges left in the world that can seriously fuck you up if you don’t take them into consideration, but most of it pathetic and weak. Think of it like this. Was technology more powerful eight thousand years ago?”

“Um...no,” Amanda answered.

“That’s right. People were still running around using sticks and rocks to kill each other,” Harry said, nodding vigorously. “Magic is the same, except instead of rocks and sticks they were using four-minute long incantations and mass-rituals to kill each other. A single wizard from this era would kick the collective arses of the ancient wizards of Atlantis.”

“The lost city of Atlantis?” Amanda exclaimed, and looked at Harry crossly. “You’re having me on, aren’t you?” She accused. “Atlantis is a myth!”

“So are fallen angels,” Harry remarked smugly and Amanda made a noise of comprehension. “And blondes with brains.” Harry added, looking pleased with himself.

“Right, funny, ha ha ha,” Amanda muttered. “So, Atlantis?”

“Yeah. Bunch of old geezers, actually,” Harry said with a scoff and a dismissive wave of his hand. “And it wasn’t a city. It was more like a university. Caught the wrong end of a thunderstorm and the whole thing collapsed in on itself. That’s what they get, though, from building a place made out of sand, glass and poorly designed spells.”

“Out of sand?”

“Yeah,” Harry said slowly, looking at Amanda as if she had just said something incredibly stupid. “What else are you going to find in Ancient Egypt?”

“Egypt?” Amanda asked with a frown, absently flicking her blonde hair over her shoulder. She stared at Harry quizzically. “I thought Atlantis was on an island or something.”

“And I thought Lavender Brown was a natural blonde,” Harry retorted quickly. He smiled, looking pleased with himself. “I’m running very well with this blonde angle, don’t you think?”

Amanda sighed. “Why does everybody think Atlantis was on an island?” she asked, rolling her eyes at Harry’s comments.

“Because that’s what the myth says,” Harry answered.

“I mean,” Amanda started and scowled. “Oh, you know what I mean.”

Harry shrugged carelessly but he answered the question. “History gets distorted. History gets retold. People forget to write things down. Hell, people can’t remember what happened yesterday properly- how are they going to remember what happened thousands of years ago?” Harry asked, and then frowned. “Don’t answer that. It was a rhetorical question.”

“I wasn’t going to answer it,” Amanda said indignantly.

“You’re a blonde, you’re bound to ask something stupid eventually,” Harry said and grinned when Amanda rolled her eyes.

“So, the myth is wrong,” Amanda clarified.

“Yep,” Harry answered cheerfully. “Historians got it all wrong. Of course, the fuss with the old gods and how they almost fucked over the world didn’t help. People were too busy dying to write things down.”

“How is it that whenever I ask you a question, the answer gives me three other questions to ask,” Amanda muttered to herself. She raised her voice and stared at Harry. “What do you mean by ‘old gods’?”

“Well, they’re gods,” Harry said. “And, you’re not going to believe this, they’re...”

“Old,” Amanda finished for him, rolling her eyes. “Okay, let me ask that again. I thought there was only one God.”

“Well, you thought wrong,” Harry said flatly. “There’s something like a dozen or so Greek and Roman gods – lazy bastards just switched sides when Rome started kicking the crap out of everybody. There’s a few Egyptian gods, although most of them were just as powerful as Dumbledore is now. The Aztecs had some – they were bloodthirsty little shits, if Meciél recalls correctly. Some of the Australian Aborigine gods are real, very spiritual, that lot. The Native Americans had some, there was one from Celtic beliefs, there’s about a thousand of them from Hindu, a few from Polynesia and...well, you get the point.”

“But the Bible and the Church...” Amanda began sceptically, disbelief plastered over her face.

Harry interrupted her with a snort. “Look, I’m not trying to impose on your religious beliefs- well, actually, I am- but your bible is full of crap. The other gods do exist, although I’ll admit that they were nowhere

near as powerful as God- and that's with a capital. It's why they lost the war."

"Lost the war? What?" Amanda asked, confusion on her face, before she sighed and rubbed her eyes wearily. "Wait, let me guess, a war is a war and they lost it."

"That's just crap," Harry said scornfully, but waved it aside. "Okay, listen carefully. Once upon a time in a land far, far away, God decided to create Earth. I have no idea how he did it, nor do I care. Anyway, there was a time that God had business elsewhere and basically left Earth, leaving all us little humans up for grabs. There were some beings back then who saw humankind as a path to power. A lot of them grouped together, some formed alliances against others and they all took a few humans and moulded them to serve them. Aztec gods used ritual sacrifices to gain strength, Egyptians used some weird magic rituals and large freaking pyramids, Romans just killed everybody and the Australian Aboriginal gods acted like they were on crack. All was well in the world, except one day God came back. He got a little bit pissed with the other gods, raised his army of archangels, Meciel being one of them, and fought a very one-sided war against them. Consider that the most powerful of the old gods is just as strong as an archangel and yeah, you got a merciful loving God kicking some pagan deity arse."

"Anyway, the old gods did not go quietly. Their human followers were of little use to them, especially since their magic was so primitive back then, so they created armies of their own design and pitted them against the forces of God- with a capital. These armies were promptly smashed to little tiny bits and both they and their gods-lowercase here- were thrown to the other side. The Earth was saved; the olds gods decided to take a nap for the rest of existence, God went back to the clouds, did the whole reincarnation as a human thing and decided to lounge around for the next two thousand years. End of story. Questions?"

"The other side?" Amanda asked quietly.

“The Outside,” Harry elaborated and sighed in irritation at Amanda’s obliviousness. “Okay, there’s this side, with the mortal realm, Nevernever, life and death, heaven and whatever. Then there’s the other side, which is...on the other side. The Fallen were banished there, so were the old gods and their armies, Hell’s over there, although it’s a lot closer to our world than you think, It’s...hard to explain, Think of a big wall in the middle of them and us. We’re on one side, they’re on the other.”

“Oh,” Amanda said and suddenly something hit her, a conversation she had once heard between her father and Sanya. “Does the Outside have anything to do with ‘Outsiders’ or something like that?”

“You’ve heard of Outsiders?” Harry asked, staring at Amanda with surprise. “I didn’t think wand-wizards knew about them. What do you know?”

“A type of demon, right?” Amanda asked slowly, a frown on her face.

“Sort of,” Harry explained with a grimace. “They’re the remnants of the servants and armies created by the old gods. Their masters are asleep but they’re not, and they can be summoned over to this side. They can’t cross over very easily, though, and they can’t stay here permanently. It’d be like us trying to live in space, their heads would explode and it would be very gory and fun.”

Amanda was silent, staring at Harry with something he recognised quite well ever since he had come to Hogwarts- awe and admiration. “How do you know all of this?” She asked wistfully.

Harry merely tapped the side of his head with a cocky smile on his face. “She’s smart, and she knows a lot, He said quietly. “Trust me; it’s not a chore to have Meciél in my head. Sure, she may eventually decide to crush my mind one day and use my body for her own purposes, but until then, I know things that only a few beings in the world know of.”

“The things your Fallen must know,” Amanda said in awe. Her eyes widened as something hit her and she stared at Harry, looking almost

fearful. "You said she was an archangel, right? Which are just as powerful as the old gods? Does that mean you're just as powerful as Meciél- and the old gods?"

"It...doesn't work like that," Harry admitted reluctantly, scratching the back of his head and choosing his next words carefully. "She can only amplify my own power and give me access to alternate and more potent sources of power and magic. Besides, even if she could give me her power, she's locked up in a very big void and she needs most of her power just to stay sane."

"Stay sane?"

"Meciél is one of the most powerful fallen," Harry said easily. A flicker of a smile curved his lips, pride glinting in his eyes. "Admittedly, Anduriel- that was Nicodemus' Fallen- was more powerful than her, but I killed him, so that makes Meciél at the top for the moment. Then there's Vesper and Balthrail, more Fallen you haven't met. They come close to Meciél, but they're still a little weaker. Anyway, the most powerful Fallen stay sane and the other ones tend to be a little psychotic at the best of times."

Harry paused and frowned. "Let's see, the Knights have maybe ten of the coins, eleven with Anduriel gone. There are twenty more out there. Out of those twenty, there's maybe seven or eight who have full mental capacity, maybe another seven or eight who are half sane but still a little wacky, and five or so who are completely fucked up in the head. The Knights tend to capture those kind the most."

"Wow," Amanda murmured. "Only twenty of your kind left in the world. You're endangered, Harry."

"Oh, funny," Harry muttered sarcastically and snorted. "Besides, that doesn't mean much. At one point or another, all of the coins have been in the hands of the Knights of the Cross- or the organisations that existed before them. But somehow or another, they're stolen back or retaken by those who want the powers of the Fallen. You know, they're very good at tempting even the most steadfast monk into freeing them."

“You know,” Amanda murmured after a pause, shaking her head ruefully. “Your life is so much more interesting than mine.”

“Believe it,” Harry snorted.

“You’d make a good teacher, you know,” Amanda observed thoughtfully. “You get really...animated, and all that. It’s much better than being a bastard.”

“I don’t know,” said Harry, a frown on his face and disappointment flickering in his eyes. “I don’t think I’m very good.”

“Sure you are,” Amanda encouraged gently. “I’ve learned lots off you already.”

The frown and disappointment vanished off Harry’s face as quickly as it had come, replaced with a mischievous smile and a disturbing glint in his eyes. Amanda noticed this and suddenly sighed, closing her eyes as if she were in pain.

“Oh Amanda,” Amanda sighed to herself, shaking her head regretfully. “You fell right into that one.”

“Okay then, let’s test out my teaching skills,” Harry said cheerfully and bounded up from his seat, rubbing his hands together in anticipation. “Do the spell again. If you get it wrong, I’m a bad teacher and I’m going to punish you by hexing you. If you get it right, I’m a good teacher and I’m going to reward myself...by hexing you.”

“What’s the catch?” Amanda deadpanned.

“If you’re good, you might have a chance to defend yourself,” Harry said with a wide grin on his face. He twirled his wand around in his hand, enjoying the way Amanda’s face had blanched.

“You wouldn’t really hex me, would you?” Amanda asked with a nervous gulp, staring at Harry with a hesitant smile.

Harry gave her a nasty smile and levelled his wand at her.

“On my mark, get set...”

“Go,” Harry finished, rolling his eyes and taking a step backwards from the summoning circle. “Go on, eat it up, you greedy little gut.”

“I think I will,” Cessbulby squealed and with a flutter of her pixie-like wings, she jumped forward and dove onto the plate of fresh bread and honey, her shaggy, silken little mane of pinkish-red hair swaying under the power of her own flapping wings.

“Oh, that is disgusting,” Harry muttered, staring at Cessbulby with a mixture of revulsion and abject curiosity as she tore into her food. Little gobbets of honey flew everywhere as Cessbulby gorged herself on the feast, spittle flying from her mouth like a shower of fine mist. “That is just...”

‘Oh, certainly,’ Meciél agreed, with a touch of amusement in her voice. ‘Perhaps you should look away.’

“What, and miss out on all the gross stuff?” Harry huffed, folding his arms petulantly. A wicked smile came over his face as a thought came to him. “She must have a very big tongue, if you know what I mean.”

‘Beloved...’

“I mean, she seems to possess the ability to stick very large things down her very small throat,” Harry continued, eying the oblivious Cessbulby with a mischievous smirk on his face. “I mean, I bet she’s very popular with the Faery males. I mean...”

‘Yes, beloved, I understand,’ Meciél said, partly in exasperation and partly in amusement. Harry felt her give the mental approximation of rolling eyes. ‘Your thoughts leave a lot to be desired.’

“I’m fourteen,” Harry said in amusement. “I’m allowed to be perverse. Besides, you live in my thoughts, so I can just blame you for anything disgusting that pops up. So...bad Meci! Don’t think like that again!”

‘Can we just get on with this?’ Meci! asked in resignation. ‘I do not like summoning this faery right under the nose of Maeve, especially since the Winter Lady knows of Cessbulby’s indiscretions.’

“Well, Maeve didn’t seem to care,” Harry shrugged.

‘No, Maeve didn’t want you to think that she cared,’ Meci! countered, and Harry felt her presence pulsing with something he had come to recognise as suspicion. ‘Just be careful with what you say and how you act around Cessbulby from now on. Our debt toward the Winter Court is clear, for now, and I’d like it to stay that way.’

‘I think Cess is on the level, Meci!,’ Harry thought silently as Cessbulby finished the last scraps of her food. The little faery lay back on the plate, idly running her hands through a small puddle of honey and licking her fingers. Her brightly glowing blue eyes swung to Harry and a mischievous grin spread across her little face. ‘But you’re right. I’ll be a little more careful from now on.’

‘My, you’re actually listening to my advice?’ Meci! asked in mock-surprise and Harry rolled his eyes, a reluctant grin spreading over his face. ‘I should note this down somewhere, just so I can come back to it for future reference.’

“Harry!” Cessbulby squealed and darted up from the plate with a flash of silver motes and a blurring of wings. A silver nimbus of ambient light surrounded her, highlighting her Fae charms as she hovered before him, just beyond the crimson and ebony barrier that prevented her from escaping. “You called! I didn’t think you would call again! Maeve told me what you did, but she didn’t let us watch anything! Why not, Harry? Was it good? Was it fun? I bet it was fun! Sporting is always fun!”

“Cess,” Harry interrupted with a pained expression, holding up his hand and temporarily silencing the little faery. “I’ll let you out and you

can tell me all about it as long as you make the vow and, for the love of Meciel, stop yapping like a little girl.”

“Oh, alright,” Cess scowled petulantly, like an annoyed child. She folded her arms over her chest and sighed. “Thrice bound, I promise to stick to our deal. Can I go out now?”

“Sure,” Harry agreed and idly kicked the bottom of the flickering magical energies. His foot scuffed through a circle of sand, breaking the circle and disrupting the flow of magic. Within a second, the barrier was down and Cessbulby was off and away.

‘The love of Meciel?’ Meciel asked amusedly. ‘Am I a deity now?’

“Well, I have been thinking of starting my own church and all church’s need a god to worship,” Harry remarked, watching Cessbulby as she bounced off the walls and floor of the empty Alternate Magic’s and the Old World classroom- the only place where Harry could actually use a summoning circle. “Although, I’m worried that it may make you a little big-headed.”

‘Oh?’ Meciel uttered lightly. ‘Big-headed. Me?’

“Oh yeah,” Harry said seriously, nodding furiously. “I’ve noticed that about you. You’re very arrogant, you know. It’s all I can do to keep you in check.”

‘This is a bit rich coming from you,’ Meciel remarked dryly. ‘Especially since you once declared yourself to be God on Earth.’

“Hey, let’s not make this about me,” Harry rebutted quickly. “This is about you and your flaws. Not mine.”

‘I live in your head, beloved,’ Meciel said warningly, laughter in her voice. Harry felt her presence tingle in his brain and narrowed his eyes. Cessbulby continued to dart around the room, constant showers of sparkling silver motes drifting to the ground as she

explored the classroom, from the desks to the roof. 'I can make life very unpleasant for you.'

"Is that a challenge?" Harry asked smugly, raising an eyebrow.

Meciel didn't say anything but Harry gave a strangled yell of horror and surprise as an image flashed before his eyes, brought on by the Fallen inside his mind. He visibly flinched as he staggered back, swallowing back bile as his face screwed up in revulsion and disgust.

"Antichrist damn it to hell!" Harry shuddered, screwing up his eyes and rubbing them vigorously. "What the hell was that? How much did she weigh and damn, she had crusty toes and there was mould on her back and the wrinkles! What was with the wrinkles?"

'One of my previous hosts had some very...odd...ideas of sexual desire,' Meciel admitted smugly. 'It was how we met, actually.'

"You mean...you, or a part of you, actually had sex with...." Harry started, before breaking off and shaking his head. "Congratulations Meciel," He muttered in a pained tone. "You have officially scarred me beyond anything that the senseless amount of violence in my life could have ever hoped to accomplish."

"Harry?" enquired a bright voice and Harry blinked, looking up to see Cessbulby hovering by his head. "Are you alright? You're not going to die, are you? I wouldn't like it if you died. Then I wouldn't get any more fruit."

"I'll live, Cess," Harry muttered, shaking his head and grimacing. "I'll be as scarred as a veteran from Vietnam, sure, but I'll live."

"Okay then," Cessbulby said brightly and zoomed forward. Harry blinked as a shower of silver motes fell before his eyes and suddenly his hair was ruffled and yanked as Cessbulby landed on his head, giggling like a child. "So, what do you want to know?"

"Just general stuff," Harry said, trying to peer upwards at Cessbulby with a frown on his face.

“I haven’t been able to see much,” Cessbulby admitted, a small pout on her face. “Maeve has kept me away from her scrying table. But I do have a message for you! From her!”

“A message,” Harry repeated softly, his eyes narrowing as wariness trickled into his mind. “From Maeve.”

‘This can’t be good,’ Meciél murmured.

“Oh, yes,” Cess giggled, ruffling his hair with her small hands. “I thought she was going to kill me at first, when she found out that I had been spying, but she didn’t seem to mind. I remember this one time when a High Sidhe told Summer that we were going to attack, and Maeve caught her and threw her to a pack of centaurs to be raped and...”

“What’s the message?” Harry interrupted Cessbulby before she could launch into her spiel, rolling his eyes at the delicate brutality of the Winter Court.

“Something about how powerful black magic is looming up ahead and how dark currents are running through the Nevernever. She said there was some major powers are at play and that something big is going to happen, and you were going to be involved. You know, a message!” Cessbulby finished brightly. Her voice hadn’t changed during the delivery of her message but Harry’s face had darkened and his brows were furrowed in thought.

“Great, just great,” Harry muttered. “That’s just perfect Cess.”

Cessbulby sniffed and flapped her wings, leaping off Harry’s head and hovering in front of his face. Every beat of her tiny wings produced a shower of sparkling motes, which smelled faintly like a mixture of sugar and fresh rain.

“I’m just the messenger, Harry,” Cessbulby said, sounding hurt.

“I know, Cess,” Harry sighed, and he reached out to stroke Cessbulby’s hair with his little finger. The little faery squeaked in pleasure, almost purring like a cat as the hurt vanished from her face. She giggled again and opened her mouth to say something, when she stopped and frowned.

“Oh, my break’s over already?” Cessbulby asked, pouting like a little girl. She sighed and gave a little shrug of her shoulders. “Summon me soon, Harry. It’s really nice here.”

“Cess...” Harry started, but the faery had already disappeared in a shimmering spiral of bright mist and glowing motes of magic. He frowned, staring at where Cessbulby had once been. “Well,” He remarked sourly, clutching his wand in his hand tightly. “That was ominous, what with the looming black magic and all.”

‘Indeed,’ Meciél murmured worriedly.

“Why do I get the feeling that I’m going to get well and truly fucked over in this next task?” Harry asked, whipping his wand up and clearing away Cessbulby’s mess with a simple household cleaning charm.

‘Because the track record is against you,’ Meciél remarked dryly, throbbing with slight worry. Harry could feel her presence blazing heatedly as Meciél turned over every loose word Cess had said, trying to find connections or link the information with anything else Harry had heard before. ‘And because you have a brain, beloved.’

“Of course I do. Where else do you live?” Harry scoffed half-heartedly, but he really wasn’t in the mood at that particular moment.

Silence filled the room as both Fallen and Host sank into their own thoughts. Suddenly it seemed as if the last few months of peace and quiet had only been the calm before the storm and Harry, despite his nature and abilities, felt a flash of trepidation fill his mind.

“What do you think it all means?” He asked Meciél, his voice soft and speculative.

‘I don’t know,’ she admitted softly.

“I suppose there’s only one way to find out,” Harry sighed and he picked himself up, gazing around the room with a determined expression on his face. Dark power glinted in his eyes, smoke curled from the runes on his wand and blazing determination scorched his mind.

‘Whatever’s out there, we’ll meet it head on,’ Meciél vowed softly, her presence washing over Harry’s. Her power filled his veins and her blazing warmth merged with his mind and comforted him. At that particular moment, Harry felt like he could do anything in the world. Still...

“How about we try to meet them more to the side?” He suggested. “Or from behind. Then we can go Brutus on their arses and stab them in the back.”

‘This is what I get from trying to encourage you,’ Meciél said, but with great fondness in her voice. Affection blazed at Harry, who sank down into a chair and stared out the window, watching the sun as it slowly set over the mountains.

“You know, I feel all philosophical at the moment,” Harry admitted softly, watching the soft red and orange hues with a reflective expression on his face.

‘Do you have any words of wisdom then?’

“Yeah,” Harry said and his lips curled up into a dark smile. “Let’s kill the fuckers.”

Soon enough, it was the morning of the Third Task. Harry had spent the last week in preparation, brushing up on his deadly arsenal of spells and finally managing to transfigure his sword into a toothpick, to put in his pocket. Technically, Harry was only allowed to bring a wand but when had he started caring for the rules. With a good nights rest behind him and Meciél's comforting presence within his mind, Harry felt that he was ready for anything that the Third Task would throw at him.

Well, almost anything...

"What the hell is this?" Harry exclaimed flatly, his green eyes widening as he stared at the scene in front of him. McGonagall, standing next to him, sniffed in disapproval but stalked out of the room and back into the Great Hall, her task of delivering Harry to the small anteroom complete. Harry's eyes sought out Amanda, who was in the middle of a cluster of people, and a sour expression crossed his face. "You have three seconds to explain, brat."

"Brat?" One of the young men standing next to Amanda asked in a puzzled tone. His expression was one of distaste as he stared at Harry warily, almost as if he were waiting for the Denarian to attack them all. Next to him, Amanda sighed and raised a dutiful hand for the rest of the group.

"That's me," she muttered and raised her voice. "Well, since you don't really have a family...since you...um...killed them, they're...we're...here to support you...for the Third Task...since there's nobody else..."

"Ah," Harry let out, blinking in mild shock as he took in the scene before him.

Standing before him was the entire Carpenter family, minus the Knight. There was Charity, the tall and long-blond haired mother. Her crystal blue eyes appraised him carefully; the usual disdain that Harry remembered was gone, replaced by careful reflection. Standing next to her mother was Molly, who eyed Harry with neutrality. Ever

since the duel with Nicodemus, Molly had stayed out of Harry's way. Harry didn't know whether it was because she was grateful that he had saved her life, fearful because of his display of power or a mixture of both. Frankly, he didn't care- the less he saw of her, the better.

Harry took in the other siblings, Meciél whispering the names that Amanda had given to him years ago into his ear. There was Daniel, the tall and lanky boy- man now, who Harry had forced to drive him away from the Carpenter household. He had been the one that had spoken before and his grey eyes pierced Harry's with a hint of warning in them. Next in line was Alicia, who looked to be in her late teens with braided dark hair. She watched Harry with curiosity rather than the fear that the next boy, a dark-haired fifteen or sixteen year old, was currently staring at him with. Finally, the two little children, an eleven year old pigtailed blonde girl and a short dark-haired boy with serious grey eyes stared at him with nothing less than awe.

"So...support," Harry said slowly, raking his eyes up and down the Carpenter family. The beginnings of an irritated scowl were forming on his face as he glanced at Amanda. "Why the hell would I need, no, why the hell would I want your support?"

"That's what I told them," Daniel muttered sourly, meeting Harry's gaze fearlessly. Harry glanced at the eldest son with narrowed eyes, disliking him already.

"Okay," He said with a careless shrug, deciding that raising a fuss at that particular moment really wasn't worth it. "If you want to support me then just tell me I'm good and go away."

'You're getting soft, beloved,' Meciél murmured and Harry twitched in annoyance, giving Meciél a mental swat of irritation.

"You're good, Harry," Amanda praised blandly and Harry frowned.

"Like you mean it," He insisted and a mischievous smile curved his lips. "Do a song. Nobody's ever done a song for me before. Better yet, make it a striptease..."

Amanda shook her head in exasperation, rolling her eyes but not appearing to be surprised at his manner. The rest of the family, especially the younger lot, seemed to be surprised. Alicia was openly frowning at him and Matthew was torn between fear and reluctant amusement.

“Here,” Charity said, speaking up for the first time. Harry blinked as she offered him a crumpled paper bag. He took it from her hands and opened it up, looking inside at the contents. It was the small gun that he had lent her ages ago, before he had come to Hogwarts and when he had just dispatched the assassins at her house. Accompanying it was a handful of bullets. “We didn’t use it at all.”

Harry scoffed and threw the bag back, which Charity reflexively caught with a startled expression on her face.

“I’m beyond guns now,” Harry boasted proudly, an arrogant smile tilting his lips. He paused. “Besides, you’ve probably blessed it or broke it or something. For me, it’s the same thing.”

Charity looked annoyed but she tucked the bag away. There was an awkward silence as the family fidgeted under Harry’s gaze. Whatever annoyance he had felt at this situation was gone now and instead, he enjoyed the squirming and restlessness of the group in front of him. Nobody quite knew what to say, but the little girl, Hope, kept staring at him with wide blue eyes. Harry frowned and stared back at her and she gave a loud, startled squeak and dove behind, as Harry noticed instantly, Charity’s very nice looking legs.

“Is she on crack of something?” Harry asked Charity, a strange expression on his face as he caught Hope peeking from behind her mother. “Because detox is dangerous to kids, you know. I don’t care or anything, but I don’t want to be around when she carks it. I’ve sort of got a bad reputation around this place- I tend to kill things, so you understand that it wouldn’t look good.”

“No, Harry,” Charity said flatly, a flash of disapproval running through her eyes. She drew herself up, levelling Harry with a piercing stare. “My nine year old daughter is not on crack.”

“Oh,” Harry said and frowned, tilting his head at Charity as he stared at her quizzically. “You know, you don’t sound too happy to see me,” “He’s an observant one, isn’t he?” Daniel muttered to his younger brother, Matthew, who let out a small snigger. Daniel turned back to Harry with a small smirk on his face but it instantly died when he saw Harry’s eyes on him. A dark emotion glittered beneath the emerald depths but it vanished as quickly as it had come

“Oh, I am observant,” Harry said cheerfully, a blinding smile appearing on his face as he leaned forward menacingly. “Watch as I observe how your broken and mangled bodies fall to the ground in a pile of your own blood after I kill you for being smart-arses.”

Matthew gulped and quickly took a step back while Daniel tried and failed to meet Harry’s gaze with confidence and bravery. Charity’s posture had become rigid and dangerous but Harry glanced towards her and offered her a cheesy wink.

“Kids,” He sighed remorsefully with a careful shrug of his shoulders. “You try to raise them up to be nice and sensible fellows and then they insult the first demonic murderer they come across. You know, this was probably a bad idea on your part. I tend to hurt the people I don’t like.”

Amanda rolled her eyes, obviously not impressed with both Harry’s comment and Harry’s wink, but Charity slowly relaxed as Harry showed no further signs of aggression and spoke up.

“I am grateful for all you have done for us,” she said, looking uneasy and awkward. Her hand impatiently brushed a strand of her out of her face- a move Harry had seen Amanda perform dozens of times. “But this meeting was not my idea.”

“Oh?” Harry murmured, blinking in surprise. A slight frown crossed over his face, as well as the first traces of wariness. “Who else would

be dumb enough to send their beloved Christian family to support a 'demon of the night'?"

"It was..." Charity started.

"My idea," Somebody called out and Harry turned around to see Michael, enter the room. Wariness and a flash of fear struck Harry and he stiffened, his eyes narrowing to slits as he observed the Knight. He hadn't seen the man in years, ever since their brief encounter which had left Harry wounded and almost dead. From what Harry could remember of that night, Michael had barely changed. His hair was cropped short, dark against a streak of silver. He had a well-trimmed beard and there were worry and laugh lines around his mouth and eyes. He was a tall man with stern but compassionate grey eyes and Harry could sense the decency and goodness that Michael had within him.

It was enough to make him feel sick.

"Daddy!" Amanda squealed from behind Harry and a blonde and crimson blur rushed forward, bounding into her father's arms. Michael closed his arms around his daughter, joy and deep-seated love entering his eyes as he clutched her tightly against his chest. Harry watched all of this with a sour expression on his face and he made a loud retching noise, rolling his eyes.

"Oh, get a room," He muttered to himself.

"Where's Sanya?" Molly asked, throwing Harry a cold look.

"Out on business," Michael answered with a slight frown. "I won't be able to watch this tournament of yours, Molly. I get the feeling that I will be very busy tonight."

"Zealot," Harry muttered softly, rolling his eyes and preparing to leave the room. However, his muttered comment had garnered Michael's attention and the Knight turned to him.

“So, you’re the Denarian that saved my family’s life,” Michael said, eying Harry carefully but without hostility. “I owe you my sincerest thanks, for both saving my family’s life and killing Nicodemus. The world is a better place without him in it.”

He extended a weathered and calloused hand and Harry glanced at it. He deliberately brushed it aside and ignored the hand as he stared back at the Knight.

“Are you sure you don’t want to offer me anything else?” Harry asked, a mocking expression of hopefulness making him seem much more innocent and vulnerable than he really was. “Because I do take cash, cheque, card and little girl’s souls.”

Hope let out a muffled squeak and shuffled back behind Charity, who regarded Harry with exasperation and disapproval. Harry gave a nasty grin and gave the little blonde girl a mocking wave. Next to Charity, Daniel shifted on his fear- looking as if he wanted to do nothing more than hit Harry at that particular moment. Harry stared back at him challengingly but before anything could happen, Amanda broke in, her voice exasperated yet resigned.

“I don’t suppose there’s nothing I can say that will make you ease up a little?” She asked with a sigh, still being clutched in her father’s arms

“Well, actually...” Harry said thoughtfully, switching his gaze back to Amanda. “If you say “Master Harry...”. No, wait, “Lord Harry, I beg you!” then I may consider it.”

“Never going to happen,” Amanda said with a bright, fake smile.

“Then I’m going to stick with the asshole routine,” Harry said with a careless shrug. “Just know that you have the power to change me. Just say the words and I will be nice.”

“Yeah, right,” Molly scoffed under her breath but Harry heard her and raised an eyebrow in her direction.

“So,” Michael intervened quickly, flashing both Molly and Daniel a stern look. “I heard you took my little girl to the Yule Ball.”

“Yeah,” Harry said dryly. “Then we had promiscuous pre-marital sex afterwards.”

“Harry!” Amanda hissed, blushing furiously as she stared at him in horror. “We didn’t,” she hastily explained to her mother, who was eying Amanda with a startled and dismayed expression. Amanda’s face became troubled and she shuddered, drawing herself deeper into her father’s comforting arms. “Besides, that night I was in the hospital wing after...Nicodemus...”

“Please tell me you’re not afraid of a dead man,” Harry scoffed and Amanda shot him a pained glare, her blue-grey eyes narrowing in anger. Michael stood back and observed the interaction between his daughter and Harry with patient eyes. “Because Nicodemus is dead. Truly and utterly dead. Dead as a fish out of water, a cow in a slaughterhouse and Serbians in Croatia.”

“That’s low,” Michael muttered, staring at Harry with disapproval. “Do you know how many people have died there in the past few months?”

“Do you know how little I care?” Harry asked flatly, before he swung his gaze to the door. “Anyway, I have better things to do than to talk to a bunch of Christians. Have a bad day and I hope you all trip on a stairway and break your legs or something.

“We love you too, Harry,” Amanda called out blandly and Harry shook his head in disgust, stalking out of the room with a disgruntled frown on his face. The last thing he heard was the little boy speaking up, asking his sisters a question in a soft, serious voice.

“Is he always that mean?”

“Yes,” Amanda and Molly muttered in unison. Once again, Harry and the Champions stood within the Quidditch Stadium to complete a Triwizard Tournament task. However, once

again the stadium had changed from a series of large stones and rocky ground into a lush twenty-foot high hedge that seemed to encircle the entire pitch. In front of the group was a darkened gap, the entrance to this vast maze of greenery. Harry's eyes flickered upward and saw a clear blue sky that was darkening as the sun went down, revealing the first of its twinkling stars. He then glanced at the other champions, all who stood apart from each other with determined expressions on their faces. None of them seemed to sense what Harry could, a darkened and ominous feeling that something big was going to happen tonight.

"So, this is it," Harry muttered, mostly to himself. His hand came up to idly brush against the pocket of his overcoat and he felt the small hard object beneath the thick material. A smile twitched his lips as he dropped his hand, feeling a little bit better knowing that he had another weapon at his disposal- the transfigured sword.

'Indeed it is,' Meciél whispered into his ear and Harry had the sensation of an unseen wind ruffling his hair, a roaring cascade of searing fire burning into his veins.

With long-practised ease, Harry grasped the power and allowed it to wash over him. The roaring presence of Hellfire, along with the euphoric bliss that came with it, caused Harry to relax and he stood loosely, a relaxed and arrogant expression on his face as he watched Bagman stand up at the podium, his voice blaring out over the darkened entrance to the maze and the hundreds, if not thousands, of spectators.

"Welcome, Wizards and Witches, to the third and final task of the Tri-Wizard tournament," Bagman began and beamed when a wave of applause and cheering roared out from the stands. He continued, "In this task, the respective champions must navigate their way through the maze to reach the centre. The first person to reach the centre of the maze and touch the Tri-Wizard trophy will receive twenty-five bonus points alongside the score that the judges will give you. Mr Krum and Mr Banks are in the lead on 75 points, Mr Diggory just one point under. Mr Potter is on seventy one points and Ms Delacour is on fifty-four. Every champion here has a chance to win today, so try

your hardest! Since Krum and Banks have the most points, they will be entering the maze first. Mr Diggory will be allowed in ten seconds later, Mr Potter a minute later and Ms Delacour two minutes later. Wizards and Witches, let the Third Task begin!"

"Here we go," Harry muttered as a loud crack filled the air. A loud wave of cheers roared from the stands as the first two champions entered the darkened maze, watching each other warily. A moment later, another crack filled the air, signalling Cedric's advance into the maze.

Harry ignored them all and stood before the maze, distantly aware of Fleur's presence beside him. He narrowed his eyes, clutching his wand and preparing to cast a spell the instant that another crack filled the air. It seemed to take forever to Harry, but a third crack finally echoed into the night sky and Harry moved as a blur, his wand flying up as he levelled it right at the entrance of the maze.

"Echosondra!

Harry flinched as a loud crackling noise hit his ears and an invisible ball of sonic energy left his wand, soaring through the maze at great speed. The tip of his wand shuddered and Harry winced, his eyes clutched shut as his spell hit a leafy wall and instantly shattered into a thousand different parts, ricocheting off the wall and further into the darkened maze. Unheard to all except Harry, a long series of loud pinging noises echoed throughout the maze and a barrage of high-pitch tones struck Harry's ears. With each tone came a tantalising flash, a grainy image of lines and darkness. Harry winced, placing a hand to his head and scrunching up his face as pain lanced through his head. However, an instant later a pulse of soothing heat banished his pain away and the images stopped as Meciél emerged from the back of his mind, taking the brunt of the spell.

This spell, which worked like sonar, was a mostly unknown and unused spell because of the detrimental effects it had on its caster. Any more than a few dozen images resulted in a considerable amount of mental trauma for the wizard, because their minds were simply unable to comprehend what they were receiving. Luckily for

Harry, who was receiving hundreds, if not thousands, of images, he had Meciél to do all the hard work for him and shield his mind from the potentially devastating effects. In a few moments, Meciél had already received, translated, organised and stored over a quarter of the maze's pathways, and in a few more moments, she had already devised the best way to get closest to the centre of the maze.

"We done?" Harry grunted under his breath, a pained scowl on his face as he stood in front of the maze entrance. "Because that hurt like a bitch."

Next to him, Fleur stated at him strangely and hesitantly, before another crack spurred her forward and into the maze. Harry could hear the crowd behind him tittering loudly but he ignored them.

'Yes, beloved,' Meciél replied briskly. 'If you follow my instructions, you will find yourself in the centre of this maze in no time.'

"Excellent," Harry muttered and raising his wand, he walked forward and entered the darkened maze.

The walls loomed around him, almost eerily, but Harry merely cocked an eyebrow and flicked his wand, a tinge of Hellfire escaping his tightly gripped grasp. A peculiar ball of crimson flames exploded in his left palm, illuminating the surroundings with a soft, red glow. Harry nodded in satisfaction, feeling a slight tickling sensation in his hand, and continued forward. He walked for a few minutes, Meciél whispering the right directions into his head whenever he reached a corner. Harry followed them without question and dove deeper into the maze. He didn't see any sign of obstacles or defences for the first five minutes, until, almost a quarter of the way into the maze, he met up with an unexpected surprise.

Harry turned right at the next corner, as Meciél instructed him to, and then came to a stop. Surprise flickered on his face and caution zapped through his veins as something loomed forward from the darkness in a barrage of strange clicking noises. It was a gigantic spider, as tall as Harry was, with clicking pincers and drooling fangs. It made a menacing growling noise and it scuttled towards Harry,

intent on attacking him. However, the first instant Harry had seen the spider he had reacted.

"Evertoxuro!" He barked, his wand whipping up as the spider lunged at him. A jet of bright yellow flames billowed out of his wand and the spider screeched as it was met with a wave of searing heat. It stumbled backwards and Harry kept his wand steady, squinting past the almost-painful brightness of the flames and the large clouds of smoke that was rising into the sky. "Irruptus Ardor!"

A barrage of red-yellow fire blasted at the retreating spider, two balls of flames striking it on the back and causing it to screech in agony as it vaulted around a corner and disappeared from Harry's onslaught. The rest of the blasts of fire struck the maze wall and the grass and Harry's eyes widened, his wand whipping up to extinguish the flames. However, there was no need as the hedge and grass didn't wither under the heat and soon the fire died down. Harry stared at the hedge and frowned.

"Well, there goes plan B," Harry muttered sourly, idly kicking at the ground with his scuffed shoes. "I guess if we're ambushed, we can't burn our way out."

'We still have plan C, D and F,' Meciél reminded Harry, who nodded and started walking forward.

"What about plan E?" He asked, turning another corner with his wand raised, as if he were expecting another spider to jump out and attack him. However, the brief encounter with that spider must have left a lasting impression on it and Harry saw nothing, only smelling a faint acrid burning smell.

'We're not using plan E,' Meciél said firmly.

"Why not?" Harry asked defensively, the beginnings of a childish pout coming over his face. "It was a good plan."

'It was a terrible plan, beloved,' Meciél said exasperatedly. 'And you know it.'

"It could still work," Harry muttered sourly, kicking the ground with his shoes and sending a small chunk of wet dirt and grass into the air. "Don't knock it just because you don't like it."

'Oh beloved,' Meciél said exasperatedly. 'Just keep walking- and it's a right turn here.'

Harry rolled his eyes as he turned the corner and came to a sudden halt. A wary look came over his face at the glittering azure frost that coated the large hedges surrounding the path. Despite that rather beautiful appearance, Harry, or Meciél, could sense an enchantment on the sparkling wash of colours. Harry frowned, his wand raised as he cautiously approached the frost.

Suddenly, from out of nowhere, came a choir of eerie singing, a beautiful and haunting spell that tugged at Harry's heartstrings. The sweet soft voices lapped at Harry's ears and for a single instant he felt peaceful- completely relaxed and devoid of all emotion. There was a soft pressure on his mind, a soothing yet completely foreign presence that was attempting to lull him into sleep. However, just as quickly as it had come, it vanished and Meciél reared forward. The full force of her majestic presence almost threatened to overwhelm Harry as the Fallen shattered the mental spell with a single spike of blazing power. At the same time, something warm fell over his ears and suddenly Harry was deaf.

The glow of the azure frost had dimmed a bit but still sparkled as Harry walked forward, his eyes flickering over his surroundings in case there was something else lurking behind them. When he had passed by all of the azure frost, Harry stopped and glanced back at it. He winced and clutched his ears as a high-pitched note spiked in his ears for a brief second, before his hearing suddenly came back and the sound of his breathing filled his ears.

"Thanks," Harry said, staring back at the frost with a contemplative expression.

'You're welcome, beloved,' Meciél said smugly.

After another casting of echosondra and a barrage of images that Meciél had promptly deciphered, Harry delved deeper into the maze. Because of the new information, Harry knew exactly where the centre of the maze was and how to get there. All that lay in his way was five corners and whatever obstacles were still guarding the trophy. As he turned the first corner, he came to a slow halt as he took in what had to be another obstacle. It was some kind of creature, half-human and half-lion, with clawed paws, a long yellowish tail and thick orange fur. It had a woman's face and parts of a woman's upper chest and her deep brown eyes swung towards Harry, a mysterious smile crossing over her face.

'It is a Sphinx,' Meciél said, not sounding worried at all. 'They are guardians of knowledge and treasure. She will only let you past if you solve her riddle.'

"A riddle," Harry muttered sourly.

'Yes.'

"I suck at riddles," Harry said and scowled, lifting his wand and levelling it at the beast, who blinked its luminous brown eyes and stared at Harry with surprise.

'Then kill it,' Meciél said carelessly. Harry shrugged as dawning horror appeared on the Sphinx's face, who opened its mouth to speak, revealing sharp canines. However, before she could utter a single word, Harry struck out.

"Effodio!" Harry snapped, and there was a flash of silver light, a loud bang and a piercing scream of pain. The Sphinx collapsed, agony flickering over her features as one of her legs, now torn to bloody shreds and splintered bones, collapsed in on itself. She looked murderous as she tried to shrug off the pain, her teeth baring in an animalistic snarl, but Harry's next spell blasted her deeper into the ground.

The sphinx flinched and screamed in pain, dark crackles of magic flickering over her frame as she twisted and squirmed in the ground.

The rage and anger in her voice had gone and she made pitiful meowing sounds, staring at Harry with fearful brown eyes. Her clawed paws scrambled in the dirt as she attempted to crawl away, shuddering with pain and fear. Harry watched her squirm as he levelled his wand at the sphinx again, her pitiful meowing noises echoing out into the night sky, and he hesitated before heaving a soft sigh.

The next spell that came from his wand was a golden flash of light- a spell that Harry had once seen Dumbledore use- and the sphinx cried out with relief as it seeped into her body, her pain temporarily soothed. She gazed at Harry with sorrowful brown eyes, tinged with both fear and disbelief, and opened its mouth to speak. A crimson bolt of magic struck her in the head and the sphinx slackened as it was blasted into unconsciousness.

'You are getting soft,' Meciél murmured, although she didn't sound too concerned. 'Harry Potter, slayer of Nicodemus and a Drakon, spares the life of the pitiful beast. Touching, truly touching.'

" Oh, shut up," Harry muttered, his cheeks flushing with embarrassment as carelessly stepped over the stunned, wounded creature and turned the second corner. "And what can I say? I love women, and cats, and women with big breasts. Although, after seeing that Sphinx, I have to say that I'm not really a fan on cat-women."

'Let me guess, beloved,' Meciél said dryly. 'Her breasts were too small.'

"Actually it was her face," Harry said, a touch sharply and frowned. "Why do you always make me out to be some kind of hormonal pervert?"

'Because your eyes were practically glued to the Sphinx's chest,' Meciél said and paused. 'Besides, you are a hormonal pervert.'

"Touche, hot and sexy figment of my imagination, touche," Harry said and a smile curved his lips as he felt Meciél's spike of amusement.

He turned the third corner of the maze and stopped, a frown flickering over his face. Something stirred in the darkness before him, something big, and Harry got a glimpse of movement before all fell still. He frowned and held out his left hand. The crimson hued flames flared as Harry drew his arm back and hurled it into the darkness. As another fist of flames burst into existence over his hand, the other one exploded in a dull flash of light, not bright enough to hurt Harry's eyes but still enough for him to get a good view of the path - and of the creature that lay at the end of it.

It looked like a giant scorpion, more than anything, and towered over Harry. A blast of fire erupted from its tail and it scuttled forward with a great burst of speed. Harry got a glimpse of thick, plate-like armour and a white strip of flesh on the creature's belly before it charged at him. With a snarl, Harry made to jump back but Meciél, in a burst of Hellfire, spurred him on. She communicated to him without words, a flash of images and insight, and Harry obeyed, charging towards the creature. The creature let out a loud hiss, sounding like a snake more than anything else, and levelled its head as it prepared to knock him over.

But Harry was too quick and as the creature loomed over him he ducked, frowning in concentration. Rage flickered over his face and his eyes glinted coldly as he initiated part of his transformation. The creature hurtled over him, its momentum too fast to stop completely, and Harry allowed the gigantic wings of bone to erupt from his back. The sharp, jagged ends tore into the white belly and the creature made an odd gurgling noise, its speed making sure that Harry's wings dug in deep. Harry felt something hot and sticky strike his face but he ignored it as he retracted his wings and neatly sidestepped, the creature's tail missing him by a centimetre.

Harry stood up and whirled around, holding up his hand and allowing the soft red light to illuminate the area. The creature had collapsed behind him in a heap of legs. A dark, sticky pool of liquid was slowly seeping out from its belly, where it looked as if a large saw had gutted the creature in two. Harry took in a deep breath, his heart racing as adrenaline surged through his veins.

"That was close," He said slowly, gingerly touching his face and trying to scrub off the blood. "Good call, Meciél."

'Well done, beloved,' Meciél said, sounding both impressed and proud. 'You moved faster than I thought you were capable of.'

"Ah, well," Harry said, shrugging his shoulders and turning away from the dead creature. "It's all in the pelvis, you know, and since I've been practising so often lately..."

He was cut off as a loud, piercing scream filled the air- decidedly feminine in nature. Harry blinked, recognising the voice as Fleur's, and sighed.

"The French," He muttered under his breath, shaking his head. "Bloody hopeless, the lot of them."

'I would dearly love to see you defeated by a Frenchman,' Meciél said quietly, amusement trickling into her tone. 'because the irony would be oh-so perfect.'

"Yeah, whatever," Harry said and rolled his eyes.

He turned the last corner a few moments later and strode into the centre of the maze, his eyes flickering over every corner in the small clearing. The Triwizard trophy was gleaming on a plinth not too far away. The entire area seemed to be illuminated by its glowing presence, driving away the shadows from the corners. Harry frowned, peering behind him and at the gap past the cup, his wand high and ready.

"So, where's the trap?" He muttered quietly, his veins roaring with Hellfire. His eyes glittered, both with excitement and wariness, and he slowly walked forward, approaching the Triwizard Cup.

'I do not sense anything,' Meciél told him quietly. 'Perhaps we were wrong. Perhaps Cessbulby was wrong.'

"Maybe," Harry said slowly. "But..."

Something blurred in the corner of his eye and Harry instinctively ducked, his wand flying up. He heard a snarl as something jumped over his head and landed behind him. He whirled around and saw a large dog with gleaming teeth spinning around, its eyes dull and without life.

'This is the trap?' Meciell asked scornfully.

"Effodio!" Harry snapped and the dog gave a single whine as its head burst apart in a shower of wooden shards and green leaves. Harry blinked as the dog collapsed, twisting and shuddering until it had turned into a branch, one that could have easily been taken off the maze. He whirled around, just in time to sweep his wand upwards and parry a streak of light, driving it into the ground. "So, it's you."

Krum didn't say anything but there was grim determination on his face as he took a step forward, his wand levelled towards Harry. His eyes flickered behind Harry, towards the Triwizard Cup, and a flash of longing flickered over his face. "The cup is mine," He growled threateningly. "And you will not stop me! Concutio!"

"Declino!" Harry snapped and swiped his wand through the air. The murky brown curse flickered and there was a small flash of red light as Harry batted it away, back towards Krum.

The Durmstrang student ducked, his eyes widening, but he pressed on his attack. The ground shuddered around Harry and a dozen blades of grass rose up into red-striped serpents. An instant later the serpents shot upwards and zoomed through the air towards Krum, who gave an elaborate twirl with his wand. The snakes became a puff of smoke, which burst into flames a second later. Krum gave a strangled yell and stumbled backwards, his wand flicking through the air.

"You idiot," Harry said scornfully as he parried another curse with ease. "If I wanted to cup, then I would have taken it. In fact, maybe I will."

"Dolor!" Krum snapped. A black orb of magic burst from the tip of his wand but Harry sneered and drove it away. It struck the ground and

disappeared in a shower of sparks and a column of oily smoke.  
"Accio Cup!"

Harry had flicked his wand at the same instant as Krum had summoned the cup. A blast of silver light flashed throughout the small clearing and Harry gave a sharp yank of his wand, causing Krum to give a strangled yell as something tugged at his arm, lifted him from his feet and sent him soaring over Harry's shoulder. As the gleaming metal of the trophy touched Krum's fingers, Krum's flailing leg brushed along Harry and with a jerk at the navel, both champions activated the hidden portkey and were vanished from the maze.

Harry and Krum reappeared, both managing to keep their footing as the Triwizard Cup dropped to their feet. Krum looked surprised but Harry looked murderous as his eyes darted around at their surroundings. They were standing in a dark graveyard, marble statues and headstones rising out around them. The air seemed thick with magic here, a dark and oppressive aura that battered at Krum and slightly strengthened Harry. Both champions whirled around and Harry wordlessly hissed out in anger. They were surrounded by a mixture of robed men. Some wore white masks and looked to be every bit as menacing as they had been described in the history books- Death Eaters- while others were unmasked. Harry could sense black magic radiating from the very pores of the unmasked wizards- true Magic, not wand-magic, and he raised his wand, Hellfire roaring in his veins.

'This is it! This is the trap!' Meciél snarled angrily.

"Secure the boy," came a cold, barking order from one of the True Wizards.

Before the man's words had even died on his lips, Harry moved as quick as a blur and lashed out. His wand flew up, flicking sharply towards the ground around him, and a shower of brown sparks sprayed from his wand, settling on the ground. A loud shudder roared through the dirt and the very ground rumbled beneath Harry's feet, threatening to throw him to the side. Death Eater's and True Wizards gave out surprised and startled yells, several falling to the ground while others clutched at tombstones to steady them. Harry managed to keep his balance and his eyes burned with fury but he twirled on his feet, attempting to apparate and flee from the ambush. He didn't even make it halfway before a strong barrier tugged at him and hurled him backwards, into reality again.

"Rotundus ictus!" Krum bellowed, his heavily accented voice thick with a mixture of fear and anger. A spinning orb of crackling yellow bolts burst from his wand with a loud screeching noise and zoomed at one of the Death Eater's. The more experienced wizard had no trouble in deflecting the spell, his wand whipping up and parrying it to the side.

Defensive magic sparkled around Harry as he easily ducked a barrage of both visible and invisible spells. Curses flew past his head, some singing his hair, and a blood-red curse struck Krum in the leg and caused the older boy to scream in pain as he collapsed to the ground, clutching his shattered and mangled leg with trembling hands. Harry stood up, his eyes glinting angrily, and glided forward, jumping over a thunderous bolt of sapphire energy. His wand flew up and for a moment he resembled a striking serpent as he lashed out. One of the Death Eater's staggered underneath the force of Harry's curse, clutching his chest with bulging eyes. Blood burst from his nose and ears and the masked man managed to twirl on his feet, disappearing from the graveyard with a soft crack of apparition.

"No! He needs to be alive!" Somebody yelled and Harry whirled around, jumping back and tilting to the side as a flash of eerie green light roared past him- the Killing curse- striking and chipping off a large chunk of a marble headstone. "Stun him! Do not kill him!"

Harry had no such reservations and defensive magic's sparkled around him, a sleet of crimson and sapphire hues forming around him. The dome of magical energy easily deflected a barrage of scarlet streaks of magic and the Stunning charms ricocheted away from Harry, striking the ground, headstones and even a surprised True Wizard, who collapsed to the ground. When one of the Death Eater's moved to revive the man, Harry struck out with blazing anger twisting over his face.

"Effodio!" He snarled, jutting his wand towards the masked and robed man. The Death Eater whirled around as a blast of silver light and a loud, roaring pop filled the air and he parried the curse into one of the headstones, which exploded in a shower of marble splinters.

"Surround him! Do not harm him!"

Harry glanced around, seeing that the Death Eaters and True Wizards around him were advancing in a tight circle. Dark power roared in his veins and with a wordless snarl, Harry levelled his wand towards the sky and summoned Hellfire. The tip of his wand glowed with crimson light and dark fire burst out in a fiery lasso of scarlet and purple flames. They circled both him and Krum, the latter looking

scared, and a barrier of searing flames pushed at the circle of enemies that surrounded him. Some of the Death Eaters flinched while one True Wizard broke the line, batting away at the fire with hasty movements, but the rest merely stood still. Suddenly the barrier of fire vanished in a puff of mist and Harry flinched at the backlash, stumbling on his feet.

It was at this moment that the Death Eaters and True Wizards moved as one. Several blasts of magic struck at Harry and broke apart upon the shielding spell. But some of the True Wizards and Death Eaters had power behind them and Harry's shield shattered under the strain of simultaneous blows. Harry gave a cry of pain as something struck at him, feeling like a dozen lashes of a whip across his entire body, and he was slammed aside. He landed on the ground, dazed. His mind stretched out to Hellfire, to his demonic form, but suddenly there was somebody in front of him. Something cold was clamped on his wrists, binding them together, and suddenly there was a cold barrier around him.

All of the blazing heat seemed to rush out of him and Meciél's presence, her essence and fury, vanished from his mind, locked away behind an impenetrable wall. Try as he might, Harry couldn't reach his magic or Meciél and true panic settled over him, his eyes widening with fear. His eyes darted down to the cuffs around him and he snarled, seeing a dark metallic material bound together by a thick chain of what looked like pure titanium. A howl of anger escaped his throat and he lashed out with his foot, striking soft flesh. One of the True Wizards grunted in anger, throwing Harry back down to the ground, while a Death Eater stepped forward.

'Avada Kedavra!' One of the Death Eaters cried. Harry flinched and scrambled across the dirt, his eyes widening and fear settling in his veins. Without his magic, there would no way he could escape. But the spell had not been levelled at him and Harry watched with a certain sense of relief as Krum sailed backwards, his body sagging underneath the destructive weight of the Killing Curse, the eerie green light seeping into his body. Krum thumped on the ground, his wand sailing through the air and clattering against a tombstone. Viktor Krum was dead.

Harry eyed Krum's body for a single second and then tried to stagger up to his feet, his eyes blazing with fury. Suddenly, something clamped down on his neck and he gagged, flailing uselessly at the powerful force that had gripped him. With a strangled yell and a spat curse, Harry was yanked to his feet and carried forward by an invisible force. He lashed out at anybody he could reach, rage plastered over his face and rushing through his veins, but without his magic he was truly powerless.

"What an animal," one of the Death Eaters muttered to his partner as Harry floated past them.

Harry was led to a very elaborate ritual circle, past a pack of crimson-eyed dogs- similar to the ones that had tried to assassinate both him and Molly at Hogwarts. Within the circle stood a bubbling cauldron of what seemed like pure gold. A soft simmering steam drifted from the contents, sparkling in an odd silver hue as it rose up in the night sky. Beyond the circle Harry could see more Death Eater's prowling the grounds, their cloaks flapping in the soft breeze. More people stood around the circle, watching Harry behind white masks or hooded cloaks.

"We have the necessary sacrifice?" One of the Death Eaters called out, his cultured voice crisp.

"We do," One of the True Wizards growled and gestured with his hand. Harry gasped with relief as he was released and he collapsed to the ground, gasping, peering up beneath his lashes with burning emerald eyes. "The effort to retrieve him was great on our part. I still don't think that..."

"You're not here to think," The Death Eater interrupted coldly. "You're here to serve, both your master and mine. So keep quiet."

"You can't order me around," The True Wizard hissed, rage bubbling on his face. He took a step forward, his brown eyes narrowing and his lips twisting into a mocking sneer. "You hold no power over me..."

"But I do..." Came a high-pitched hiss.

On the ground, Harry stared as a balding and watery-eyed man moved from the shadows, carrying a small bundle in his arms. It was no larger than a small child but its reddish-black hairless, scaly body was far from human. Its arms and legs were feeble and its face was flat and snake-light, with gleaming red eyes. It looked weak and helpless, seemingly totally dependent on the wizard that carried it. Yet it seemed to possess an aura of darkness that made it seem much more powerful than it probably was.

The Death Eater immediately bowed his head, subservience replacing authority in his posture. The True Wizard, however, stared at the creature with disdain- although Harry saw a flicker of unease cross his face.

"My Lord," He said slowly, carefully. "I serve you because you serve my Master..."

"I serve no being," The small baby-like creature snarled and a deep tremble of anger pierced the air, so potent that Harry could sense it even with the magic-restraining cuffs on him. "The Dark Lord is, and always will be, his own Master. Your master needs my assistance, and it is within my power to grant it. It is also within my power to retain it."

"My master is more powerful than you are," The True Wizard said, but he was looking decidedly uncomfortable and he fidgeted underneath the small scaly being's crimson glare.

"Your master is nothing without me," The being said chillingly. "And you are nothing without your Master. Do not forget that."

"Of course, Lord Voldemort," The True Wizard said, gritting his teeth with anger. He gave a short, sharp nod of his head and backed into the circle while Harry watched the proceedings with poorly-concealed shock. Voldemort? The same Voldemort that had blown himself to bits years ago trying to kill Harry? He was still alive?

"You're behind all of this," He distantly heard himself say, his emerald eyes glinting angrily as he glared at Voldemort. A hatred that Harry had not felt since he had killed the Dursleys rose up in his mind and

he wordlessly hissed at Voldemort, his lip curling in disgust. "Look at you. You're pathetic. No wonder you couldn't kill me."

"We will talk later, Potter," Voldemort hissed menacingly. His crimson eyes locked onto Harry's and Harry gave Voldemort a challenging smirk, almost daring the banished Dark Lord to invade his mind. Despite the fact that he couldn't reach Meciél at the moment, Harry knew that the Fallen was still within him, protecting his mind like she usually did.

However, Voldemort didn't take the bait and glanced away, gesturing towards the golden cauldron. The wizard that was carrying him flinched and seemed to tremble but he reluctantly obeyed and moved towards the cauldron. The soft muttering and chatter instantly died down and all was silent within the graveyard as Voldemort stared down at the cauldron.

"Begin the ritual," The weakened Dark Lord whispered coldly. Harry squirmed underneath his bindings, glaring coldly at the wizards surrounding him. He had been strapped down to a large angel made of the purest marble. In another time and place, Harry would have laughed at the irony but now he just silently raged at his predicament, desperately trying to overcome the binding's enchantments, but both his magic and Meciél remained out of reach. Growling with anger, Harry focused his eyes back on the scene in front of him, powerless to do anything to stop it.

"I am going to kill you all," Harry snarled loudly, his green eyes flashing as tugged at his bindings one more time. "I swear, I will make you pay for this!"

Some of the Death Eater's shifted under his burning gaze but most of them remained silent, their wands clasped against their chests like swords. An eerie silver light was glowing from the tip of each wand as they turned their gaze towards their master, who had just sunken under the surface of the cauldron. The True Wizards were chanting something on the other side of the ritual circle, spitting out harsh words with great hatred. Hatred and rage poured from them and the

mixture of the cauldron bubbled underneath the oppressive black magic, a dark stain on the solemn graveyard.

"Bone of the father, unknowingly given, you will renew your son!" The pudgy wizard cried out, his voice ringing into the air. The ground cracked and shuddered and a stream of white dust rose into the air, seeping into the cauldron. The surface of the liquid hissed and sparks of pure dark magic flew in all directions. A vivid, poisonous blue mist rose off the surface and crackled with energy as the True Wizards chant intensified.

"Omnis aveo Ater Dominus! All hail the Dark Lord!" One of the Death Eaters cried out and the silver light emanating from his wand darkened into a shade of murky grey.

"All hail the Dark Lord!" The rest of the Death Eater's chorused, their wand light dimming as well.

"The power of the gods, given in trust, you will resurrect your new servant!" The pudgy wizard cried out again. His watery blue gaze flickered over towards Harry's crisp emerald glare and he flinched, hurriedly darting his eyes away. This time the very air shimmered with darkness, shadows warping out from silver light like a thick liquid. The True Wizards increased their chant, spitting away with words of ancient black magic, and the darkness fell into the cauldron. The diamond-sheen surface of the cauldron turned pitch black as the shadows poured in and a crack of thunder filled the air.

Harry glanced up and his eyes widened. The bright moon and the twinkling stars were being blotted out as thick, stormy clouds loomed above. There was a flash of lightning and another loud rumble of thunder filled the air, strangely fitting into the True Wizards chant. The cauldron bubbled, a thick and oily splatter of liquid dripping to the ground. It spread through the dirt like a poison and the grass around the cauldron shrivelled up and died in a matter of moments.

"Omnis aveo, unus et verus! All hail the One and True!" A True Wizard chanted loudly, his eyes glittering with madness as he spread out his arms. The darkness converged on him until it seemed as if he were cloaked in shadow.

"All hail the One and True!" The rest of the True Wizard chanted. "All hail..." and here they pronounced a name so distorted and raspy that Harry could barely understand it. It was as if somebody else was speaking from within them, a voice that had not been designed for human vocal cords or ears. The closest approximation Harry could get was "Azzeh."

Harry curled his lip up in hatred but uneasiness was pounding through his veins. Something was wrong, something was very wrong. The very air around him was screaming in protest of what was happening in front of him. A great hatred, rage and calculating evil was beginning to settle down on the graveyard. Harry was no stranger to these emotions, but the presence he could sense was far greater than anything he had encountered before. Even Meciél, in all her terrifying glory, could not have competed against what he could sense.

"F-Flesh of a servant, w-willingly given..." The pudgy wizard stuttered, fear rampant on his face as he lifted a curved blade to his left elbow. Tears glistened in his eyes as he took in a deep breath. "You will revive your master!" The wizard pressed down on the blade and Harry watched with surprise and a dry mouth as blood splattered on the ground. A loud scream pierced the night and something splashed into the cauldron as the wizard sobbed in agony, falling to the ground and shaking his head in a futile attempt of denial.

"Istuc calator, fidus et merus! We are your servants, loyal and pure!" The Death Eaters chanted loudly, bathing the entire area in a flare of darkening grey light. A soft, bright green hue of light was slowly coming into the grey light and if Harry looked closely enough, he could see a faint serpent-shaped mist forming in the background.

"Istuc chiliasta, divus et verus! We are your believers, blessed and true!" The True Wizards chanted loudly, and the shadows around them pulsed with an ancient evil, malevolence and hatred pouring into the clearing.

The storms above them rumbled with great fury as another clap of thunder boomed through the sky. Lightning flashed and a bitter sheet

of rain swept down from the heavens. Harry felt it strike his exposed head and winced as one touched his lips, the smell of rotten food and dead flesh filling his mouth. Lightning flashed once, then twice, and illuminated the sky as another clap of thunder filled the air. Black Magic crackled in the storm clouds, just waiting to be unleashed and Harry watched, a glint of true fear shining in his eyes as he watched the ritual come to a close.

"Hearts of heathens, torn assunder, you will strengthen our god!" One of the True Wizards chanted. His brethren intensified their chant- it was a yell now- and Harry watched as an ornate urn rose from the ground and hovered over the cauldron. Slowly, it tipped to its side and a stream of thick, crimson blood poured into the cauldron. An instant later Harry saw small, dark lumps fall into the cauldron with soft plopping noise and he shuddered. There were some things that not even he had delved into yet. The darkness of the liquid seemed to lighten as a burst of unholy crimson veins spread throughout the thick liquid.

"Sacrifice," Harry muttered to himself, his eyes wide. Fear had clamped down on his heart, just as tightly as the manacles had clamped down on his wrists. He was alone in all of this, his one constant ally blocked from his mind, and there was nobody who could- or wanted to- save him. Horror dawned on him as he recalled the words of the Death Eater. He was a sacrifice- he was next.

"B-Blood of t-the enemy, f-forcibly...taken," The injured wizard gasped, his face a picture of agony and pain as he raised his wand with quivering hands. Harry flinched but stared the wand down, hatred surging through his veins. So, this was it- this was where he would die. "Y-You will resurrect y-your foe!"

Harry grunted as something sliced into his cheek from jaw to brow. Hot blood splattered down on his coat and shirt and a crimson curtain enveloped his left eye as blood pooled into the socket. Still, Harry had suffered through worse pain before and he merely set his jaw and watched with anger as a stream of blood- his blood- flew towards the cauldron. The golden cauldron shuddered the instant that Harry's blood seeped into the surface of the liquid and the clouds rumbled with thunder once more. Lightning flashed, silhouetting the looming

figures in the summoning circle and suddenly everything was silent. The chanting had stopped and the flaring lights emanating from the wands of the Death Eaters had dimmed, until only darkness shrouded the area.

Harry strained to see past it, anger and fear tugging at his heart as he furiously struggled against his bonds. The occasional flash of lightning allowed him to see the Death Eaters and the True Wizards prostrating on the ground, their heads bowed in subservience, while the man who had cut off his arm was sobbing by the cauldron. Suddenly a flash of silver vapour burst from the cauldron and a bright, white steam billowed into the air. The lightning flashed again and thunder rumbled in the clouds as powerful black magic gathered above the cauldron, forming into a swirling vortex. The vortex was of no colour that Harry could comprehend, no colour that existed on this world. It flittered at his mind, as bright as the sun and as dark as the ocean depths, and a strange sense of wrongness filled him, followed by a burst of true fear.

It could not be.

They would not dare.

But it was.

And they had dared.

Lightning flashed and thunder rumbled as, before the pouring rain and the prostrating wizards, a skeletal-white humanoid figure arose from the skeleton. Crimson eyes glittered with power and wrinkled white skin smoothed over with dark magic. Slit snake-like nostrils flared as the newly reborn Lord Voldemort spread out his arms, oblivious to his nakedness, and let out a chilling, high-pitched laugh. The Death Eaters quivered with fear and even the True Wizards shuddered at the figure before them, who continued to laugh as he bathed in the hatred and anger generated by the ritual.

Then a bolt of lightning struck him.

Voldemort's laugh cut off as he let out a howling screech of pain, his arms coming forward to clasp at his chest. The vortex of black magic swirled with sentient hunger as lightning flashed again and again, striking Lord Voldemort over and over. A continuous roll of thunder filled the air, a deafening racket that made the very ground shudder as Voldemort collapsed into his cauldron, his high-pitched screams piercing the air. Something burst out of the vortex, a presence of ancient malevolence, and it streamed down into the cauldron. Cracks shattered through the priceless gold and the vortex howled as Voldemort's began to laugh once more.

The Dark Lord's high-pitched voice started to lower and the cauldron shattered and broke apart, sending a rush of dark oily liquid all over the ground, seeping into the decaying ground. Voldemort's voice continued to drop and something ancient rang deep within the newly reborn Dark Lord. Harry listened with horror as the most malevolent and disturbing laugh he had ever heard filled his ears. Goosebumps popped over his skin and real blinding terror filled his heart as Voldemort stood up from the broken remains of the cauldron. It seemed as if nothing in Voldemort had changed but when the Dark Lord turned towards Harry, the Denarian Renegade's breath caught in his throat as he caught sight of two burning crimson orbs, shining like torches in the dark and stormy night.

"Faithful Death Eaters and devoted Believers," Voldemort- or whoever he was now- hissed out, a mixture of tenor and bass as he raised his arms. The shadows rushed towards him and enveloped his form, clothing his naked body in liquid darkness. "I have returned!" The graveyard was completely silent- even the twisted hounds put their heads between the oversized paws and eyed the Dark Lord with nothing short of subservience. The respectful silence was shattered as Harry slammed his bindings down on the marble angel behind him, his fear easily surging into hatred as he eyed crimson-eyed being with a hateful glare.

"Who the fuck are you?" He snarled, slamming his bindings down again to no avail. "And what the fuck is going on!"

"You will not break those bonds, Potter," said Voldemort, or was it? A malicious smile curved his thin lips and his crimson eyes gleamed in satisfaction as he watched Harry struggle before him. "They have been designed specifically to restrain you, my little Denarian friend. It is Faerie magic that stops you from drawing in your magic and it is the blood woven into the enchantments, your blood, that stops you from seeking out the assistance of that pathetic bitch."

"My blood?" Harry asked furiously, breathing in deeply as he eyed the newly reborn Dark Lord. "Where the hell would you get my blood?"

"Do you not remember, Potter?" Voldemort asked softly, his voice as menacing as a snake's hiss. He moved forward and ran a slow finger down Harry's bloodied cheek. A sinister smile crossed his face as he put his finger in his mouth, his eyes fluttering as he tasted Harry's blood. "You have given the ground your lifeblood many times over, largely due to the efforts of my warriors. It did not take much effort for a loyal servant acquire the bloodied rags used during your healing."

"The traitor," Harry snarled to himself, both with anger and dawning horror.

"As for my name," Voldemort continued, drawing himself up and allowed the shadows to flicker and warp around him. "I am Lord Voldemort and I am the Great Azzeh! I am one and I am two! Banished from this world long ago, I have returned to reap my vengeance and..."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," Harry spat out, eyeing Voldemort- or was it Azzeh now?- with gleaming eyes. "I get it, alright? You're big, bad and powerful. You're going to bring darkness to his world and all that crap."

There was a sudden intake of breath from the bowed heads of the Dark Lord's servants. The being in question blinked his luminous red eyes and stared at Harry with an alien expression, devoid of all recognisable human emotion. The wind howled as it swept through the graveyard and a light drizzle of foul-tasting rain swept through the silent circle. Voldemort's crimson eyes burned into Harry's orbs and the young Denarian shifted, ducking his head just in case the being in

front of him could force his way into his mind. Suddenly a soft, sinister chuckle escaped from Voldemort's lips and he motioned for his servants to rise.

"Rise my priests, rise my faithful," He chortled. The Death Eater's and True Wizards hesitantly stood up, watching Voldemort with wary eyes as the Dark Lord. "Rise and watch as I triumph over the obstacle that brought upon my fall. You, Harry Potter, will suffer greatly for what happened that night. However, in a way, I must thank you- for Azzeh never would have been freed if not for you."

He paused and tilted his head as he stared at the quietly-sobbing wizard on the ground. It was the same man that had lead the ritual and had cut off his hand, and he gazed at Voldemort with tearful eyes.

"My Lord...you promised...please, my lord, please..." The wizard sobbed, holding out the bloodied stump of an arm.

"You deserve this pain, Wormtail," Voldemort said softly. "However, of all my servants, you have been, to this very moment, loyal!" The last word was hissed out and the Death Eater's in the circle shuddered, swaying on their feet and looking as if they wished to back away- but did not dare to.

Voldemort raised his wand and whirled it through the air. A streak of what looked like molten rock hung shining in the wand's wake, hissing as a gentle spray of rain fell on it, and then soared downwards. The Death Eater, Wormtail, shrieked in agony as molten rock attached itself to the bloodied stump. A loud sizzling sound filled the air and the Death Eater's remained still as the brightly glowing lump of molten rock stretched out into an arm-shaped object. The brightness glaring from the spell diminished as the glowing lava hardened into a glittering black substance, attached seamlessly to Wormtail's arm.

The Death Eater's sobbing abruptly ended as he stared at his new arm with wide eyes, still shining with unshed tears. Slowly, he raised his arm and slammed it down onto a nearby headstone. A loud crack filled the air as the marble headstone- at least five centimetres thick- cracked into several pieces and fell to the ground.

"Master...it is...wonderful!" Wormtail whispered and scuttled forward, placing adoring kisses along the Dark Lord's foot. Voldemort let a satisfactory smile cross his face and with a blur of movement, kicked Wormtail away from him. Wormtail squealed but scrambled backwards.

"May your loyalty never waver again," Voldemort said softly. Wormtail nodded his head frantically and stood up, taking his place within the circle as he clenched his new arm, his eyes glittering with devotion.

"Milord..." A Death Eater began but Voldemort raised his hand. The man screamed in agony as the shadows leapt from Voldemort and into his body, something dark and powerful searing into flesh. It was both similar and different to the Cruciatus Curse and the others cringed as the man's scream rose up into the night, blood beginning to drip out of his ears as he collapsed to the ground.

"This is the price of your sins, Lucius," Voldemort hissed softly, unclenching his white, spindly fingers. The man abruptly relaxed and lay panting on the ground. "You, of all my Death Eater's, were expected to obey my instructions. I was displeased to hear of how foolishly you handed away one of the items I entrusted to you."

"Master..." The Death Eater groaned, attempting to stand but failing miserably. "I...merely wanted...to...to...show that the Heir...of Slytherin..."

"Enough," Voldemort cut in sharply. His eyes glittered with anger as he regarded his fallen Death Eater. "You have proven loyal to me in the past, Lucius, so I will grant you the privilege of serving me once more. Perhaps you can atone for your past mistakes."

"You...are merciful, my lord," The Death Eater, Lucius, groaned and crawled his way back into the circle. He remained on the ground, shivering as the aftereffects of the spell caused his body to shudder.

"Yes," Voldemort breathed in, his eyes flittering in pleasure. "Am I not merciful, brothers?"

"Yes, my lord," The respective Death Eater's muttered, bowing their heads.

"And my Priest," Voldemort added, turning his crimson gaze on the other side of the circle. The True Wizard, who had also performed in the ritual, bowed his head reverently. "Do you think I am merciful?"

"I am your true servant, Revered One," The priest answered humbly, his rough voice echoing out into the night. "It is not my place to judge the qualities of your nature. I am here only to serve you."

"Yes, that is your only task," Voldemort said musingly. "However, I reward those who serve me well. You will come to me after we are done here and I will grant you a boon of unimaginable power. The world will fear you, priest, the world will fear you."

"Your generosity overwhelms me, Revered One,' the dark priest mumbled and filed back into the circle. "My god was right to choose you."

"How, Master?" One of the Death Eater's asked softly, his voice hitched with awe and fear. Voldemort let his lips curve up into a smile and he swung his gaze back onto his Death Eater's. "How has this came to be?"

"Is this where you start your bad-guy monologue and boast about how wonderful your plans were and why absolutely nothing went wrong?" Harry asked with a snarling growl and Voldemort's smile disappeared. Rage flashed behind the Dark Lord's two crimson eyes and Harry instinctively flinched, feeling the dark power coursing before the man's body before him.

"I could torture and kill you right now if you prefer," Voldemort said softly, reaching out and caressing Harry's hair. Harry shuddered with disgust at the touch but fear wracked through his body. He did not want to die. Voldemort's eyes gleamed as if knew exactly what Harry was thinking and he withdrew his hand.

"There are some who know the story of Lord Voldemort and some who know the story of the Great Azzeh," Voldemort continued,

prowling around the circle. The shadows followed him, like a eager dog all too willing to serve his master, and he stretched out his hands, idly examining his new body. "I will begin at the defeat of Lord Voldemort."

Some of the Death Eater's shuddered at the words and drew their robes around them, as if the very mention of the incident that occurred thirteen years ago was blasphemous.

"I, Lord Voldemort, set out to destroy the Potter family. You, my faithful Death Eater's, know of my hatred for those meddling Aurors- cocky and arrogant fools who dared to defy me," Voldemort begun softly. "Having learned the location of the Potter family from my faithful servant, I took my wand and went to destroy them-once and for all. James Potter was easily crushed- he had skill but lacked the true power to stand up to my abilities. Lily Potter did not even attempt to fight and pleaded for your life, begging me to spare you and take her instead."

A low chuckle filled the air but Voldemort let out a single, menacing hiss, his eyes burning with fury.

"Yes, Death Eater's, I also laughed," Voldemort continued coldly, his glare making even the most imposing Death Eater tremble. "I laughed when I killed her. I laughed when I turned my wand against her child. I did not laugh when her sacrifice brought forward old magic. I did not laugh when my own curse rebounded back upon me. I did not laugh when the very power I wielded crippled and destroyed me. Aah, pain, my friends, pain beyond what you could imagine. My body destroyed, my powers broken- I was little more than a spirit, less than a ghost. I was forced to flee and I settled in a faraway place...surely, my loyal Death Eater's would find me, to perform that magic that I could not and restore me to my former glory. But they did not come and I was alone."

A shiver ran through the listening circle of Death Eater's and Voldemort paused, letting his gaze run over the masked wand-wizards. Harry let out a loud snort, interrupting the silence and staring at Voldemort with a derisive scowl on his face.

"It's a bitch when ancient magic comes back and kicks you in the arse, isn't it?" He said viciously. Voldemort spared him a brief glance and ignored him, going back to his story, and Harry, despite himself, settled down to listen.

"However, my powers may have been broken and my body reduced to ash, but other avenues remained open to me. You all know of how I strove for immortality, of how I pushed the boundaries from one world to the next. My human body, as powerful as I was, hindered my attempts but now, as a spirit, I was able to bridge the distance between realms...in a limited fashion, at least."

"Near-death and without allies, I spent my lonely years attempting to push forward from this realm to another. I could feel the power behind the walls, I could sense the magic that would make me whole again. The forest that I inhabited became my place of sacrifice. Creatures of all sorts- pathetic muggles when I could gather them- became my sacrifices as I sought to push past the boundaries. My quest was interrupted by a wizard and I took control of him. Through him I learned of the Philosopher's stone and I thought, perhaps there is another way, perhaps I could restore myself to my natural form."

"Yet that failed. Once again, Dumbledore strove to defy me. Once again, I was torn assunder out of me new host. Once again, I was forced to flee into the deepest, darkest parts of the world. As my Death Eater's dined in their homes and enjoyed their unbroken powers, I submerged myself into my research and at last, years later, I succeeded. I bridged the distance between the life, death and magic to...somewhere else. At last, I thought, I could restore myself to power!"

"But the Outside was not what I had expected. Powerful beings, more powerful than I, even, resided there. Most were dormant, forced into exiles by powers we can not comprehend, but there were some who aware of my presence. They latched onto me, hungry and wild, and attempted to destroy me- to make me one of them. But I prevailed over them and sought out sentient contact, confident that there was somebody there that I could use. It was here that I struck a bargain with a...King, of sorts."

"His master dormant, Azzeh lusted for power. Fearful of the old ones awakening, he sought to stretch his influence over to our realm. He had already gained the services of a group of powerful wizards, different from our kind, but powerful all the same. Although he could not directly restore my body, for his realm is not ours and the attempt would have destroyed me, he did know of a way. Together, we plotted. In exchange for his servants and power- power I needed to crush that old muggle-loving fool- I would accept a part of him within me. I would become his avatar on Earth, spreading his darkness to the four corners of the globe. When I had conquered all, we would bridge the gap between our worlds and I would ascend as his equal. Together, we would rule."

Voldemort paused and a sinister smile crossed his face. The Death Eater's remained perfectly still and Harry sensed that many of them were horrified at what they were hearing. It seemed as if they hadn't been aware of the full details of the ritual before they had participated in it.

"An Outsider," Harry said flatly, breaking the silence and staring at Voldemort with a mixture of stunned horror, disbelief and fury. "You've taken on the power of an Outsider."

"Yes," Voldemort hissed softly and flexed his arms. The shadows that clothed him writhed and boiled and he smiled, his crimson eyes flaring with power. "I am more powerful than any mere wizard now! I am more powerful than Dumbledore, I am more powerful than the White Council, and I am more powerful than you, Harry Potter."

"But..." Harry said slowly, his mind racing as everything began to fit into place. "There was somebody who could stop you. Somebody who, despite their lack of magic, possessed a weapon that could slice, dice and split you in half. Somebody who you feared."

"The Knights of the Cross," Voldemort finished and nodded. "I had encountered them before in my youth and I knew that although they did not possess magic, they were formidable warriors. I managed to defeat one in Hungary but I was sorely wounded afterwards. Azzeh advised caution and I agreed. Luckily for us, there were only two out of the maximum three Knights alive at the present moment. The third

sword had not chosen a new master since the death of its former Knight. My task was made easier and was very simple. The Knights needed to be destroyed, or at the very least, distracted."

"Nicodemus," Harry breathed softly, his eyes wide. "You, what? Set it up?"

"In a way," Voldemort answered, looking pleased as Harry began to grasp the full scope of his plans. He paced around the circle, idly twirling a wand in his left hand as he focused his entire attention on Harry. "Nicodemus' daughter was killed by the Knights, however, it was due to my actions that she was ambushed. However, her father was not as upset as I had previously thought. It took careful planning and much of Azkaban's power to twist Nicodemus' revenge into an insatiable lust."

"However, I found myself with two problems. Nicodemus was unstable- he was hard to control and his desire for revenge consumed him completely. I admit freely that I did not account for the human desire to cause pain. In his mind, the worst thing that he could do to the Knights was destroy the very thing they sought to protect- their families. Because of this, his focus shifted from the Knights towards their families. Despite this, I believed that Nicodemus would succeed. Should he destroy the family, the Knights morale and ability to fight would be weakened. In here came my second problem. You."

Voldemort paced restlessly as his eyes burned into Harry's. Anger and hatred seemed to fly between the two and for them, it was just the two of them in this graveyard. Harry gave a tight, icy smile and allowed a flash of arrogance to wash over his face.

"I must have really pissed you off," He said victoriously, his lip curling up as he stared at Voldemort with burning eyes. "Here you are, all ready to set yourself up as a great dark lord, and a little boy kept getting in your way, stopping your plans."

"Indeed," Voldemort said coldly, his hand clenching his wand tightly as dark power flashed behind his crimson eyes. "You were a most unexpected variable- one that neither I nor Azkaban had accounted for. At the eve of their destruction, you saved the Carpenter family. You

killed the last of Nicodemus' men in Chicago, you evaded my Death Eaters at Salem and you destroyed the last pack of darkhounds within the very ground of Hogwarts. The Carpenter family evaded capture and went into hiding, hidden from even my powers, and the last two members sought refuge at Hogwarts, behind Dumbledore's wards and your wand. For a moment, it seemed as if we were at a stalemate."

"Then the Knights struck at a band of loyal priests. Yes, the attack was far from here but the message and intent behind the attack was clear. They were onto us," Voldemort said and gave Harry a tight smile, his nostrils flaring as he took a deep breath. "I needed to destroy them or remove them from the arena. The second would prove much easier than the first. Especially since my loyal Death Eater had entered you into the Triwizard Tournament."

"Why?" Harry interrupted, a puzzled frown on his face. "That's the one thing I don't get. Why the hell did you enter me into that stupid tournament? What did the tournament have to do with the Knight's death?"

"Everything, Potter, and nothing," Voldemort answered softly. "My servant had been dispatched to Hogwarts under the most unlikely of guises in order to acquire me a sacrifice. I needed a youth powerful in both magic and mind. What better way to determine the most likely candidate than through the Triwizard tournament? The champion who prevailed would have shown that they possessed the power I needed to renew myself. However, a day before the goblet of fire was to activate, you showed yourself and my servant had to improvise. Not knowing what I know, I can understand the logic behind his decision. Here you were, the boy-who-lived, the one who had defeated me, the one who must have some deep, hidden power within him. My servant saw the perfect opportunity and confounded the goblet into accepting your name. This gave me the perfect opportunity to destroy you."

"The first task," Harry said with a groan. He heaved a great sigh and glared at the Dark Lord. "You controlled the Drakon that tried to kill me."

"I did," Voldemort answered softly and smiled viciously as Harry groaned again. "It was not easy, subduing that ancient beast. It required promises of revenge- for the Knight had slayed its brother- and many large quantities of gold to ensure that the Drakon would bend to our will. In the end, Azzeh succeeded and I gave it three tasks. It's first task was to kill you. It's second, kill Dumbledore- a man I knew would oppose me when I rose back to power. It's third task, reap as much destruction on Hogwarts as possible. However, it failed."

"I kicked it's arse from him to Russia," Harry sneered and Voldemort merely nodded, looking displeased.

"It had not occurred to me that you would have contacts in the other world of magic," Voldemort said softly, hissing at Harry's grinning face. His wand trembled with dark power, as if he wanted nothing more than to destroy Harry then and there, but he restrained himself. "It was only afterwards that I discovered your true nature. Imagine my surprise when Nicodemus informed me of who you really were. Harry Potter, the Boy-Who-Lived, had submersed himself into the darkest magic's of hell. The hero of the Wizarding World had...Fallen...from grace."

"Oh, love the pun," Harry muttered. Suddenly he was struck across the face and he winced, his head slamming back into the marble angel. He could taste the coppery tang of blood on his lips and he looked up, eyes blazing as Voldemort lowered his wand.

"However, the incident was not a total failure," Voldemort continued, pacing around the marble angel with gleaming red eyes. "One of the Knights was dispatched to Hogwarts and suddenly, I saw an opportunity. My servant gave Nicodemus access to Hogwarts during the Yule Ball. However, once again, Nicodemus proved to be unreliable and instead of slaying the Knight, he hunted down the family. Both you and the Knight raced to defend the mudblood and in the struggle, Nicodemus was killed."

"Without a wand, even," Harry said, a dark gleam in his eyes as he glared at Voldemort. "I wrapped my hands around his throat and strangled him to death."

"My time was looming closer and closer," Voldemort continued silkily, ignoring Harry's words. "The ritual was almost ready and I had no choice but to leave the Knights alive. I dispatched agents around the world to lure them away from England and away they went. I had failed to kill them but they were distracted. It would have to be enough. It was then that I finally received a message from my servant. He saw the need to warn me about your prowess and suggested that I display caution when I received you."

"Let me tell you, Potter, it had not occurred to me to use you for the ritual. You were an unknown entity that needed to be destroyed. But my servant opened up a new path for me. Not only could I use you to restore myself, a irony that I found my satisfying, but I could negate the ancient magic your mother left upon as well. Azzeh agreed with me- he did not want such a weakness to exist in his new avatar's body. You will be surprised to learn that I was relieved to hear that you survived the events of the Second Task. You were no use to me dead."

"I'm touched," Harry muttered, giving a tug at his bonds. He could see that Voldemort's speech was coming to an end and knew that his death would soon follow. The fear and panic that Harry had buried under his mind threatened to rise up but Harry ruthlessly suppressed it, forcing it back down and keeping his mind on the task at hand. "Remind me to put you on my Christmas Card list."

"And now we come to his place," Voldemort finished, throwing his arms out and gesturing to the surroundings. "On the night of the Third Task, my servant enchanted the Triwizard Cup to bring you here. Foolishly, you fell into my trap and now I have arisen, more powerful than ever before. The world will know fear once more..."

"Bullshit!" Harry snarled, interrupting Voldemort. A loud titter went around the circle of Death Eater's and True Wizards as Voldemort whirled to face Harry, his eyes blazing with fury. "Tell me, Voldemort, who the hell is going to fear you? You got you're arse kicked by a baby! You're a joke to society! People laugh at you Voldemort, they say that you must have been a pathetic and incompetent Dark Lord to

lose a duel with a baby! Tell me, can you name one other person- just one- who lost to a one-and-a-half year old child?"

"Are you challenging me, Potter?" Voldemort hissed dangerously, his wand trailing over Harry's cheek resting at the hollow of Harry's neck. "Be warned. No wizard has ever escaped my wrath."

"I have," Harry stated coldly, his burning eyes boring into Voldemort's without fear. Distantly, some part of him wondered if this was such a good idea but Harry shrugged the thought off. Hatred and fury roared in his veins, he didn't need Hellfire to feel such immense hatred for the figure in front of him.

"Very well," Voldemort said after a pause and smiled coldly, backing away from Harry. "Let us match the powers of Lord Voldemort, the most feared Dark Lord of all time, avatar of Azzeh, against the powers of Harry Potter, the Boy-Who-Lived, Denarian Renegade!"

He whipped his wand and suddenly Harry felt his cuffs fall off. Heat scorched into his mind and suddenly Meciél rushed for him, her blazing presence wrapping around him and washing away his aches and pains. Hellfire roared into him as Harry staggered up off the ground, his eyes never leaving Voldemort as one of the Death Eater's, at the behest of his master, threw Harry his wand.

'Meciél...' Harry started.

'I know, beloved,' Meciél said quietly. 'I saw it. I saw it all.'

"I presume you know how to duel?" Voldemort asked with a soft hiss. The shadows seemed to arch over him and lightning flashed in the sky, silhouetting his dark frame against the decaying and dying ground. A loud peal of thunder rumbled through the air and sheets of rain began to fall from the sky. The storm was starting again

"The first one to die, loses," Harry said crisply.

"Precisely," Voldemort answered softly and lifted up his wand, his crimson eyes gleaming with satisfaction. "I have been looking forward to this for a very long time, Potter."

Harry said nothing as he drew in vast amounts of Hellfire. Dark power flared through his wand and raindrops sizzled as they touched the glowing red runes. Hatred, rage, fury, fear, bloodlust- they all flowed through his mind as Harry immersed himself in the deepest, darkest parts of himself.

'You have done well, beloved,' Meciél whispered into his ear gently, a soothing voice that swept away his fear. 'Now you must do a little better.'

'What should I do?'

'Live, beloved, live.'

"Let us begin!" Voldemort hissed and a bolt of lightning flashed through the air, thunder rumbling after it. Beneath the raging storm, surrounded by Dark Wizards and facing the most powerful opponent he had ever known, Harry tightened the grip on his wand and lunged forward with a roar of defiance.

Harry closed the distance between Voldemort, his mind blazing with Hellfire. Meciél's presence overlapped his consciousness, seeping into his brain until it was like the two were one. Together, their body wrought with pure Hellfire, they charged forward. His wand glinted with dark magic, crimson light pulsing off the runes, and with large sweeping movements, as if the wand was a hammer, Harry roared out an incantation, his voice echoing in the stormy night.

"Vorago Aquilus exussum!"

Power rocketed from his wand, Blazing True Magic guided by the cool tinge of wand-magic. It was guided by Harry's will and Meciél's skill and Voldemort's eyes widened just a fraction as the ground fell beneath his feet. Flame roared from the chasm, whipped up to a frenzy as a ferocious gale roared forward, howling in from every direction. The circle of Death Eater's and priest staggered underneath the gale as Harry tapped into the darkness generated by the ritual, amplifying his spell. The fire sucked in grass, dirt and dead leaves and, fanned by the wind, seemed to solidify into a red-streaked jelly of pure heat. In the middle of it all stood Voldemort, his feet supported by nothing but his flickering shadow. He looked startled but slowly he smiled and took a slow step forward. It was as if the fire was trying to suck the Dark Lord down into the chasm but Voldemort took another step, and then another.

"Leave him!" The Dark Avatar cried out, his red eyes gleaming with power. The Death Eater's and Priests, who had leveled their various weapons at Harry, slowly stepped back into line as Voldemort continued to stroll through the flames.

Harry grunted with effort, Hellfire roaring through his body in one continual rush of heat and power, his wand quivering as he forced as much magic into the spell as he could. Voldemort continued striding towards him, walking on nothing but his own shadow, and slowly he strode out of the wall of flames and although patches of the shadow hissed and boiled, the Dark Lord seemed unaffected.

"How quaint," Voldemort whispered softly and lifted his wand. With a short flick, Harry grunted in pain and staggered back as Voldemort broke his spell. The chasm rumbled and closed up again as the fire

disappeared into nothingness, leaving nothing more than scorched dirt and the smell of burnt ozone lingering in the air. "But, allow me..."

With a blurred movement, Voldemort struck out and an agonising scream was forced from Harry's throat as the Cruciatus Curse slammed into him. Pain unlike any pain Harry had experienced before, not even in his training with Meciél, lanced through Harry's body. Distantly, he could feel Meciél trying to counter the effects but she too was wracked with pain and Harry toppled over, his arms and legs flopping out uselessly. Thousands of white-hot knives dug into him as Harry writhed on the ground. But as soon as it had come the pain was gone, leaving a cold, lingering feeling of weakness.

"That's how it is done, Harry," Voldemort said softly, lowering his wand and allowing Harry to stagger up. Harry glared at him with pure hatred in his eyes, a trickle of blood oozing from his nose. He wiped it with his hand and closed his palm, his teeth clenched together. "Flashy spells are no match for my power. You should remember that."

"Oh, we'll see," Harry growled and thrust out his hand- the one he had wiped the blood on. The crimson liquid was glowing bright with power and exploded with blood-red fire as Harry roared "Cruento adustum!", and hurled it towards Voldemort with great force. The ball of fire zoomed through the air, but Voldemort flicked his wand and the blood-red flames were parried aside, striking one of the tombstones.

However, instead of exploding in a burst of flames, it shot back at Voldemort with a loud pinging noise, making the Dark Lord hurriedly side-step and whip his wand through the air. Harry watched with extreme concentration, his wand making tiny flicking movements as he redirected the ball of fire back towards Voldemort. Voldemort whipped his wand up, deflecting the ball of fire with a flash of golden light, but the ball merely rebounded off the shield and shot straight at one of the surrounding True Wizards. The man gave a chilling death scream as the fire burned into his face, melting flesh and scorching bone as the ball rebounded off his face. The man collapsed to the ground as Voldemort spun around. A loud snapped-out incantation caused the ball to disappear in a wisp of smoke.

"So, you have..." Voldemort started but Harry ignored him and jumped forward, his wand lashing through the air. Great clouds of steam burst out and billowed towards Voldemort, who raised his wand. The steam parted and looped around the shadow-clad figure, shimmering and twisting into dozens, if not hundreds, of pieces of twisted scrap metal and shooting back at Harry. Harry flicked his wand upwards, his face scrunched up as he aligned defensive magic around him. Crimson and sapphire hues of light encircled him and the stream of metal slammed into it, disappearing in showers of silver sparks. At the end of the stream, Harry made to lower his shield but suddenly something blasted against it- a blow so powerful that it shattered the shield. Harry staggered back just as something slammed into his stomach and he doubled-over, wheezing in pain. An instant later something struck him up against the chin and Harry was knocked from his feet, flipping over and landing on his stomach on the muddy ground.

"It's very impolite to interrupt another when they are talking, Harry," Voldemort said chidingly, his dark eyes flashing with power. The Dark Lord twirled his wand in his hand as Harry glared at him from the ground. "But I think it's time to end this game. Good bye, Mr Potter."

With a quick jump, Harry was back on his feet and his wand was swinging through the air as Voldemort swished his wand and two voices rang out in the darkness.

"Effodio!"

"Avada Kedavra!"

A blast of silver light, accompanied by a loud crack, flashed through the air and collided with a deadly jet of green magic. The sound of a loud roaring wind filled the air and Harry grunted as his wand vibrated in his hand. His eyes widened as a narrow beam of pure golden light was connecting both wands and he looked up, a furious expression on his face. Voldemort was staring at him with hateful eyes and was gripping his own wand tightly. A blast of pure song burst from the golden light, a haunting melody that both soothed and frightened Harry. Something touched his mind, a whispering voice that seemed to seep into his mental defences.

With a huge burst of power, Meciél shoved both the voice and song out of Harry's head. Hellfire filled his veins and Harry yanked the wand out of the golden threads of light. Almost immediately the song faded away and the light dissipated, sparkling into multiple bursts of golden sparks. Both Harry and Voldemort staggered back, but Harry surged to his right and flicked his wand, barking out "'Effodio!"

A blast of bright silver light burst from Harry's wand with a roaring crack. Voldemort's head shot up as soon as he heard the loud crack and his wand flew up. A dark light glinted from the tip and Voldemort stretched out his empty right hand. The silver light shimmered with an odd purple light and homed in towards Voldemort's hand. Instead of exploding, it hovered over the long, spindly fingers, before Voldemort hurled it back at Harry at great speed. Harry managed an awkward sidestep, his wand sweeping out in front of him and parrying his own curse aside. But the backlash of the hasty movement made him stumble and he fell to the ground.

"Let's try something new, shall we?" Voldemort called out softly, his serpentine voice hissing. He made a slight gesture with his hand and for an instant his glowing crimson eyes became a deep black.

Harry, who was staggering upwards, suddenly gave a cry as something slapped along his body. His head swivelled backwards and to his utter astonishment he saw a dark shadow clasp his arm. More shadows moved forward, seeping along the ground like they were alive and clutching at Harry's legs and arms. His wand was knocked from his grasp and an utter feeling of coldness came over him. Both Meciél and Harry roared in defiance, Hellfire pouring into his veins as he tried with all his might to thrash free of the shadows.

Some of the shadows smoldered and broke apart but they were replaced by a dozen more inky-black coils. It was covering his arms and legs and all of his chest now and it was cold- a cold that Harry had never experienced before. Slowly, he stopped struggling as the searing heat of Hellfire seemed to fade away. Harry was barely aware of the shadows creeping up his face, barely aware of Meciél's voice- distant and faint- barely aware of the rising laughter echoing in from

the circle of Death Eater's and Azzeh's Priests, barely aware as the shadows crept over his face.

He was barely aware when he stopped breathing.

An eternity of darkness seemed to spread out before him- an eternity of freezing cold that swept away any chance of warmth. Cold stabs of icicles pierced the last vestiges of his mind, destroying any effort to resist and Harry felt something tugging at the deep core of his very being- something dark, ancient and undeniably powerful. It was a greedy and hungry presence, vastly dwarfing anything that Harry had felt before- anything except Meciél. She seemed to rally at the very feel of this presence and blazing heat shot through this freezing body. But it was not enough...it would never be enough...and slowly, Harry started to fall into the darkness of blessed sleep.

Then a great white burst of light permeated his very being. It was blinding in its intensity and heat- a heat far more pure and holy than Meciél's Hellfire. The freezing sensation swept away from his body, blasted away by the pure force of the white light, and Harry could feel the warmth of Meciél's presence again. But when Hellfire met this bright white light, it brought along a searing heat that seemed to be more painful than the Cruciatus Curse Harry jerked, his eyes swinging open as the shadows slid from his face. He took loud gaping breaths, his mind clearing up, and he jerked his hand away from the white light, his flesh blistering with pain.

Above him stood a man in metal plate armour. His very presence seemed to banish away the darkness of the graveyard as he faced down a furious- and was that fear that Harry saw- Voldemort. In the man's hands was a sword of white and silver flame, a powerful artifact of holiness facing down the pure darkness of a Dark Avatar. Distantly, Harry could hear shouts of shock and surprise and beyond the man was another bar of silver flames, which swept through the ranks of the Death Eaters and True Wizards. But Harry focused his gaze on the man, seemingly stunned as he finally recognised him.

The Knights of the Cross were here.

"Run, Harry, run!" Michael urged softly and whirled around to face Voldemort. The sword in his hands flared up with holy fire and his very being radiated with an unshakable power- something completely and utterly different to magic. "We will handle this!"

"So, you reveal yourself at last!" Voldemort hissed, his face twisting up in hatred as he took in the Knight. The shadows warped around his sickly-looking frame as Michael charged forward, Latin words of prayer spilling from his mouth as he brought up his blade. Voldemort's wand whipped and a blast of crimson light poured forward but the silver fire dancing on Michael's blade flared up and the curse disappeared under a wave of brilliant light.

Voldemort took a step backwards, a flicker of surprise running through his face, and Michael cleared the last few yards and drove his blade forward. For a moment, it seemed as if Voldemort was about to be impaled on the giant blade. However, an instant later the shadows rose up from around him and met the blade with a shower of blue sleet of lightning. Shadow and Holy flame clashed and once where the Knight's blade might have cut through the dark powers, now it merely clanged against it with flickering burst of electric-like sparks.

Voldemort smirked and twirled on his feet, disappearing as silently as a wraith. He reappeared a dozen paces away and pushed out with his arms, a serpentine hiss escaping his throat. Power roared around him and the shadows bowed to the Dark Avatar's will, melting into a spear-like creation that was twice as long as Harry himself. Michael quickly surged forward but was forced to stop and bring his blade up as the spear lunged at his head. His blade parried it aside but Voldemort merely outstretched his hand. An invisible blast of power lanced forward and even though Michael's blade managed to absorb most of it, it still sent the Knight hurling backwards. The Knight's blade flashed with silver flame as he jumped back on his feet, seemingly undeterred as he charged towards Voldemort again.

"You know," Harry panted as the last vestiges of weakness left his body. He was still clammy and cold but he finally felt as if he had the

strength to climb back up to his feet, his wand soaring from the ground and into his hand. "He made a lot of sense then."

'Running would be a wise choice,' Meciél agreed as Harry slunk back against one of the tombstones, content to be ignored for a few moments.

The Death Eater's and True Wizards had broken away from the circle and were fighting against somebody in the distance. Silver flame occasionally flared up and in it's reflection Harry saw Sanya duelling against at least a dozen dark wizards. He seemed horribly outnumbered and outclassed but for some reason he fought his way through the magic-wielders without gaining a scratch. It was hard for Harry to describe, but the simplest way he could put it was that Sanya was always in the right place. Spells and curses that would have reduced his body into a gory heap missed him by centimetres, flames that would have scorched his bones into dust struck the ground rather than flesh. The ground rumbled as two long tree-roots burst out of the ground but Sanya had already moved forward and by the time that the roots lashed out at him, he was out of range as he cut a True Priest in half with blurring silver brand.

"Portkey?" Harry muttered as he quickly ducked behind a tombstone, avoiding a flash of magic that struck the ground with a shower of sickly yellow sparks. Anger and power blazed through his veins but it was accompanied by a good dose of fear and commonsense as the loud noises of battle and detonating curses filled the night sky. "Can I make one?"

'It will not work,' Meciél said quickly and Harry felt her reach out with her extended senses, probing out at their surroundings. 'The wards here are powerful and you do not have the time to destroy them. No, you must use the Cup. If they are smart then they will have made it resistant against summoning charms. You need to make your way across the battlefield and take it!'

"Whatever you say," Harry replied grimly. He reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a small stick of wood. With a muttered incantation and carefully concentration, Harry enlarged and reversed the transfiguration on his powerful sword and gave a dark smile. The

runes on his sword and wand glowed in unison with an eerie red light, illuminating his position as he stepped out from behind the tombstone. He scanned the graveyard, absently wiping the blood away from his eyes as it oozed from his scar, which was beginning to give off a slight burning sensation.

"There he is!" Somebody shouted just as Harry's eyes found the Triwizard Cup, which was lying over a hundred metres away. Harry took a quick step forward, ducking a flash of booming sapphire magic and bringing his wand up. With a quick flick of his wand, Harry whirled around to confront the two True Wizards who had moved to confront him.

"Argentum telum!" He barked out. Oily smoke curdled off the runes of his wand as a glimmer of silver light formed in the shape of an arrowhead, shooting forward at great speed towards the first Dark Priest. The man, however, raised his arm in a flash, a dull glow of purple light spreading out from a bracelet on his wrist and a sphere of magic completely surrounding him. Harry's curse shattered on the shield as the second Priest brandished his blasting rod.

A blinding bar of white-fire, almost liquid in appearance, burst forward with a blinding intensity and shot towards Harry, who gracefully sidestepped. The bar of fire struck into the ground, tearing through earth, rock and marble as it sliced into a tombstone. Harry winced as debris shot up, striking at his exposed face and jabbed his wand forward.

"Avada Kedavra!" He spat hatefully, his green eyes glinting with dark power. In the practise sessions, Harry had never been able to get the curse to work. Now, in this graveyard and surrounded by death, hatred, fear and vast chasms of residual black magic, it was almost too easy.

A streak of bright green magic blasted from his wand, fed by the darkness both from within Harry and from the surroundings. A loud roaring noise, almost like an invisible wind, filled the air and the streak of bright green light sliced into the protective dome of magic and hit the True Wizard in the shoulder. The man didn't make a sound as he toppled backwards, a dawning expression of horror

dying on his face as he collapsed to the ground. The other Dark Priest paused, looking completely dumbfounded as he stared at his dead friend, and it was this hesitation that allowed Harry to surge forward. His sword flashed out towards the other man's face but it clanged on a hasty dome of sparkling yellow magic.

Harry's arm clenched as the sword shuddered, painful vibrations running through his arm and he gave a grunt of pain. The True Wizard staggered back by the force of the blow, looking disorientated but still supporting his magical dome of defensive magic. Harry growled, hellfire pulsing in his veins, and he lifted his sword above his shoulder, slamming it down against the dome. The runes inscribed into the sword flashed with a unholy red light as Harry poured his power into it, his lips automatically spitting out "Firerajo!"

Burning azure flames burst from his sword, something steel-hard, steel-sharp flashing forward. A thin arc, like a boomerang, shot through the air, filled with compressed flames and flickering with a soft blue light. The very air rippled as the arc of azure flames sliced past the Dark Priest's shield, exploding like a molotov cocktail of blue flames. The man gave a short pain-filled scream as fire jutted into his body but it was cut short as Harry's sword sliced through the air, slicing the burning man's head off.

'Look out!'

Without Meciell's warning, Harry would have been crushed by the amount of power that accompanied the roaring column of wind that swept for him. But he had already ducked and neatly sidestepped as the gale burst forward, ripping up grass and dirt and sending it hurling forward. Anger blazed in his veins as Harry spotted the glittery flash of the Triwizard cup just as another Dark Priest stepped forward- the same man who had led the other half of the ritual, the High Priest.

"You have done well, but it's not enough to save you." The man snarled, his elegant voice rich with anger as he stepped forward. His ceremonial robes whipped up as he twirled his staff in an elaborate gesture. Light blazed at the tip, swirling coils of fire forming up into a column of flames as the High Priest hurled it at Harry.

"Ignus corpus!" Harry muttered, centring and thumping his wand on his chest. An instant later the flames were upon him and the High Priest gave a cry of victory as large gouts of flames exploded out around Harry and enveloped his very form. His laughter died as Harry emerged from the flames, his sword surrounded by a glimmering aura of scarlet magic. The air rippled with newly formed thermals and he appeared to be unaffected by the flames licking at his body.

"Did you honestly think that you could kill me with fire?" Harry scorned loudly. He gave a sharp, short jerk with his wand and brandished it forward like a whip. A coil of blazing flames lashed out, a tongued-whip of fire striking at the High Priest, who merely slammed his staff into the ground. The fire disappeared into a fine sleet of mist and suddenly a blast of lightning roared from the mist. With finely honed reflexes, Harry hurled himself to the ground as the ground exploded underneath the powerful electrical blast, stones shattering and thunder booming. A flash of heat blasted at Harry's face but as usual, Meciél suppressed the pain and revitalised his body, allowing him to jump straight back up and confront the High Priest.

"Contego puniceus!" Harry barked, flicking his wand. Defensive magic's formed around him, a burning dome of flicking red and black energy that glowed brightly with the glittering hues of Hellfire. "Avada Kedavra!"

The High Priest didn't move an inch but the top of his staff flashed with a burst of light. The ground rumbled and an entire coffin exploded out from the cold damp earth, zooming forward and slamming into the jet of green light. The wood exploded in a flash of green flames and crashed to the ground. With another flash of light, the still-burning coffin slid across the ground. Harry gave a sharp flick with his wand and jumped over it, soaring over two metres in the air and landing on his feet with his wand extended out in front of him, just in time to meet a roaring strike of magic.

He grunted and his shield flickered, dimming slightly as it expended most of its power to deflect the curse that would have splattered Harry into a fine mist of blood. Still, the very force of the blow sent Harry soaring back and he landed on the ground with a dull thump, a

flash of pain flaring up in his chest. With a grunt, Harry staggered up, only to duck as a orb of dark light exploded a few meters away from him. His eyes flickered to the right for a split second, taking in the scene.

The ground rumbled and the shadows crept forward as Michael emerged from the explosion unscathed. He was duelling with not one but two swords now, silver light flashing as the blades clanged of Voldemort's spear of darkness. The Dark Avatar's eyes were glowing with a dark light as he forced the Knight back, huge blasts of power surging forward with a finesse that Harry had never seen before. Blasts that would have pierced Harry's most powerful defences shattered upon the silver blades, which seemed to be immune to any form of magic that Voldemort hurled at it. The grass became hissing snakes but Michael, possessing the same luck that all of the Knights seemed to have, was able to avoid them as he jumped forward. An instant later, a row of jagged rock exploded from the ground and it seemed that Michael was just able to avoid being impaled. The Cruciatus Curse blasted forward, deflected by the blade and slamming into the ground with a loud crack, while shadows slashed at Michael's back, causing the Knight to grunt and swing one of his blades around. The shadows gave a loud squeal as they were vaporised by silver fire but Voldemort pressed his advantage, his wand whipping forward and forcing the Knight back. It was clear to Harry that Knight was losing, despite the potent blades he wielded and the unnatural luck he possessed.

At the same time, Harry had surged forward, briefly ducking behind a tombstone to avoid another coil of lightning and allowing Hellfire to completely flood his body. Within a few seconds, Harry had changed from human to a giant armoured, wings of bone whipping out as Harry raised his fist. A coil of lightning struck him in the chest, ripping through armoured plates, but Harry merely bellowed in pain, his mind almost consumed by the dark powers infused into his body. He slammed his fist down at the High Priest, who was staring at Harry with shock and fear as he crossed his arms across his chest, defensive magic forming around him- which the first met an instant later.

To Harry, it felt like striking a unmovable concrete pillar with a normal hand. Pain flashed from his arm and Harry roared in pain as a wave of vibrations and shudders shot up his arm. But the shield collapsed in a shower of crimson sparks and the High Priests face rocked back, his eyes already fading as his body crumpled and splattered beneath the force of the blow. Harry roared loudly, triumph surging through his body as he slammed his foot down on the Priest's already mangled body. Streaks and jets of light bounced off his armoured hide as he spun around, his glowing sets of eyes focusing on the Triwizard Cup. Once again, somebody stood in his way- Voldemort, who had just knocked Michael back with a bolt of shadows.

With a bellowing roar of triumph, a noise that rose above any other in the graveyard that had become a battlefield, Harry lumbered forward with his thick legs, raising his fist and launching a powerful blow at the Dark Avatar's head- and missing. Harry's fist slammed into the ground, which shuddered and cracked open as Voldemort, fuelled by the dark shadows surrounded him, slid past Harry's defences with fluid, graceful movements. The tip of his wand glowed with an eerie yellow light as Voldemort moved sinuously through Harry's open arms, rising his wand in a graceful movement. He moved like water around Harry's enormous bulk, a continuous flow of dark shadow and yellow light, the wand clasped in his hand slicing into Harry's thick armoured plate as if it were a warm knife in butter. Harry roared in anger and pain, his wings lancing forward at an attempt to stab at Voldemort but the Dark Avatar merely flowed over them, his wand slicing through bone. One of Harry's wing nicked flesh, but the other was sliced off and it disappeared in a flash of oily smoke as Voldemort tore through it with his glowing wand. In less than three seconds, Voldemort had destroyed Harry's Bone Wrym, finishing it off with a grand blast of power that sent Harry, weighing over a ton, soaring through the air and slamming into the ground over twenty metres away.

'Revert to your human form!' Meciell advised, her voice full of worry, but Harry didn't need to be told twice as he fought past the blooming pain in his shattered chest, which looked as if somebody had ran a welding torch through it. An instant later, Harry was human again, lying in the muddied ground and shivering as the after-effects of the pain fled his mind.

"Fuck me sideways," He growled softly. His green eyes flashed back towards Voldemort, who was engaged in battle once more with Michael. Claspings his wand in his right hand and his sword in his left, Harry grimaced as Voldemort hurled a jet of green light at Michael, who neatly sidestepped. "I just got my arse kicked."

'I suggest that we take the time to leave right about now,' advised Meciél, the strain in her voice belying her calm voice. 'Further confrontation with that wizard will lead to ruin.'

Harry nodded, more to himself than Meciél, and started to pick him up when a thundering explosion caught his attention. Purple flames blasted out from over the other side of the battlefield but Sanya surged forward, his sword flashing with silver light and protecting him. His blade flared with silver fire as he twirled it through the air. It looked as if he were surrounding himself with the silver fire but as several Death Eater's raised their wands, a multitude of very dark curses pouring out- including a Killing Curse- they broke apart on the silver flame and vanished in a burst of sparks, all except the killing Curse, which veered away from the silver fire and into the back of one of the True Wizards. A second later tree roots burst up from the ground but Sanya seemed to dance over them and struck down another of the Dark Priests. Although most of the True Wizards showed a greater strength than the Death Eater's, it was they who were being struck down. Despite Sanya's skill, whenever he approached a Death Eater they merely disappeared away, reappearing several metres away. True Wizards lacked that skill and were sliced apart with Sanya's great sword. However, the Priests fought back and one of the large marble angels suddenly lashed out with its arms and clasped Sanya to its bosom. It shattered a second later as Sanya jumped free, avoiding a large spear of stone that jutted up into the angel's embrace.

Harry was dragged out of the role of spectator as three of the Death Eater's that had disappeared reappeared right in front of him. For a split second, Harry's gleaming green eyes bore into the three masked wand-wizards. Two large bulky men stood beside a third slimmer man with haughty grey eyes and a gleaming cane in his hand.

"Kill..." The middle Death Eater started, his cultured voice clipped with anger and frustration.

"Tutamen atra flamma!" Harry barked out quickly, his wand flying up. Dark power roared in his veins as the tip of his wand glowed with crimson light. Dark fire burst out in a fiery lasso of scarlet and purple flames, blasting forward and spiralling at the small group of Death Eater's. The two bulky Death Eater's roared in agony as the fire blazed across their chests and were thrown back with great force but the third, who seemed to be skilled, disappeared with a soft pop.

He reappeared a few metres behind Harry, who whirled around just as the Death Eater rose his cane into the air. Harry glimpsed a snake handle on the gleaming rod of wood before the Death Eater plunged it to the ground. There was a loud bang and an invisible wave of magic burst from it, a shockwave of pure energy that hurled towards Harry. Harry grunted, his arms swinging up to cross his chest as he deflected the spell, a crimson glow emanating from both his wand and sword. He took a staggered step back as the wave blasted across him and raised his wand, just as the Death Eater swiped his own wand through the air. A soaring crow of azure magic burst forward with an eerie cry, zooming forward and homing in towards Harry. Harry flicked his wand and the curse exploded in shower of sparks- sparks that suddenly became a shower of daggers that soared towards Harry.

'This man is skilled, if not powerful.'

"For the love of..." Harry snarled, his wand whipping through the air like a blur. The flying shower of daggers detonated into piles of debris, which turned into small buzzing insects that darted in front of Harry's face. Harry growled as they darted in, preparing to deliver vicious stings on his exposed flesh, and with a barked incantation destroyed the insects with a blaze of fire, which partially absorbed the first of a barrage of powerful and deadly curses. Harry had to throw himself to the side as the ground exploded from beyond his feet, narrowly avoiding a deadly jet of green light and spinning out of the way of a dark crimson flash of Cruciatus.

"Irruptus Ardor!" Harry barked, ducking underneath a sizzling bolt of sapphire magic and rising up to brandish his wand towards the Death Eater. Multiple blasts of fire burst from his wand and the Death Eater disappeared.

'To your left!' Meciell hissed, her advanced senses able to detect the Death Eater's apparition location before he appeared and Harry spun around, his face contorted with anger and his wand sweeping movement. "Evertoxuro!"

The Death Eater reappeared and reflexively sidestepped to the left. But the jet of fire that sprayed from Harry's wand billowed out towards him, smoke pouring into the air, and the Death Eater disappeared again, a loud crack barely heard in the battlefield of light and noise. The man reappeared, ducking to the right. He barely avoided a blast of bright green magic that soared over his head and his grey eyes widened as Harry surged towards him. The Death Eater raised his wand, a curse on his lips, just as Harry lashed out with his sword. Metal slammed into wood and the Death Eater's cane splintered and was driven from the Death Eater's hands.

"Avada..." The Death Eater started but broke off as Harry struck out with the sword again, hastily ducking the glowing scarlet blade. Wands flashed through the air as they clashed against each other, the Death Eater parrying and flicking with finesse and skill and Harry ploughing in with blunt force and power. In the end power defeated skill as the Death Eater failed to parry a forceful flick of Harry's wand and he gave cry of pain, the bones in his right arm shattering underneath the power of Harry's curse. He twirled on his feet, disappearing away and did not appear.

"And once again the axe beats the scalpel," Harry muttered darkly, idly ducking as a searing bolt of crimson light splashed past him, reflected from Sanya's blade several dozen metres away. Something glinted in the corner of his eye and Harry turned his head, finally spotting the Triwizard Cup that he had been seeking. However, once again Voldemort was partially blocking the path and Harry growled, fury and frustration bubbling deep in the pit of his stomach.

Michael was being forced backward as Voldemort pressed on, the Knight finding it difficult to counter Voldemort's power. Although his blades broke apart and smashed most of Voldemort's spells, Voldemort seemed to have an unlimited reserve of energy- probably because of Azzeh's powers- and was pressing on with the shadow-formed spear with great skill and strength. Michael whirled the two blades in his hands, parrying and blocking blows that would have skewered him and launching his own attacks at Voldemort, who countered with apparition.

Michael lost the advantage as Voldemort thrust his spear forward, and the Knight grunted in pain as one of his blades was knocked from his hand. The silver fire died out as the blade clattered to the ground. Michael fell back, his face pale and desperate as his sword blurred through the air, parrying and countering Voldemort's attacks. Fire lanced from Voldemort's wand, breaking apart on Michael's blade, and a flash of green light barely missed the Knight's head as Michael sidestepped the Killing Curse. Voldemort stabbed forward with his spear and Michael clashed his sword against it, sleets of crackling electric-like sparks flashing through the air. With a deadly like hiss, Voldemort pushed back Michael with his spear and unleashed an invisible blast of power. Michael grunted and was lifted up from the ground, his eyes bulging as he was hurled backwards.

"I will enjoy this!" Voldemort hissed softly, his eyes flashing with the darkness of Azzeh. Harry, who was stealthily making his way towards the Portkey, saw shadows warping around the Dark Avatar's body as Voldemort gathered his enhanced powers, preparing to destroy Michael once and for all. As Voldemort raised his hands, pools of sapphire and crimson light flowing into them with a blinding intensity, Harry saw for a split-second a weakness. Voldemort had left himself open.

Without a second thought, Harry darted forward, his own blade in hand. Crimson light gathered on the runes as Harry, in the split second he had, lunged and plunged his sword right into Voldemort's exposed side. There was a loud screech of pain and Harry grunted as a flash of blinding scarlet light pulsed through the air, searing into his eyes. The sword in his hand shuddered madly and suddenly Harry's hand was burning. With a roaring thunderous boom, Harry was

thrown aside with great force and slammed into one of the tombstones. Pain flared in his chest as bones snapped and Harry gave a soft groan, dizziness spreading over his mind as the last lingering traces of sapphire energy crackled around his body.

'Your wand!' Meciell cried out. 'Your sword! Find something! He is coming!'

Harry scrambled for his wand and sword, his hands sifting through dirt and broken rock as Voldemort loomed above him, his eyes completely black. Cold and ancient evil stirred in the Dark Avatar's eyes just as Harry grasped the hilt of his sword. Metal hissed on rock as Harry brought his sword up with a roar, Hellfire roaring into his veins and into the sword- or what was left of it. Voldemort watched with a sense of amusement as Harry stared with wide eyes at the remains of his sword, a melted stub for a blade and a cracked, broken hilt.

"You could have been a great asset," Voldemort hissed softly, lifting his slender wand and levelling it at Harry's head. "You could have been great indeed. Goodbye, Harry Potter, and give your parents my regards."

'Beloved!'

"Avada..." Voldemort started, green light pooling at the tip of his wand, and Harry, slammed against the broken tombstone, watched on with wide eyes. Fear shot through his body and suddenly time seemed to slow down as his fingers grasped something metal, something painfully hot. He wrapped his fingers around it and suddenly pain coursed through his body. Still, Harry used all of his strength and swung it forward as Voldemort finished, "Kedavra!"

There was a flash of green light and then a blazing bar of silver flames. An invisible wind howled and two voices screamed out in agony as silver fire coursed through both of their bodies. Holy light flared up as Harry, grasping one of the Swords of the Cross, slammed the blazing instrument of God into Voldemort's stomach. Light danced in his eye and it's pain joined that of the pain in his body. Every fibre of his being screamed in protest as holy flames surged

through his unprotected skin, meeting searing Hellfire with painful results. At the same time, Voldemort screeched out with pain and staggered back, his ebony orbs wide with shock as he clutched a pale hand to his bleeding chest. Harry stared at the blade in his hand, stunned and utterly speechless. A myriad of emotions rushed through him, too fleeting and confusing to be understood. Distantly, Harry could feel the flesh on his hand sizzling as he gazed at the glowing sword in his hands.

'How is this possible?' Meciél whispered into his ear, her voice stunned and full of disbelief.

"Who gives a fuck!" Harry growled softly and suddenly his body was filled with a new sense of energy. Both the fires of Hell and holy fire burned in his veins, creating a painful combustion of pure energy. With hatred and determination welling up within him, Harry staggered up, his eyes glittering furiously as he glared at Voldemort.

Silver light danced on the blade on his hand as Voldemort watched on. He was severely wounded but bled a liquid darkness instead of blood, which dripped from his chest and dissolved into a faint dirty mist. Voldemort tried to raise his wand but Harry lunged forward, his sword piercing the robes of darkness. Silver fire met oily darkness and suddenly there was a cascading wave of light. Harry was thrown back as a thunderous boom echoed around the battlefield. Crimson lights lanced through the air and the thunderclouds flashed with lightning as, with a sudden terrible and ancient cry, a rushing mass of shadow poured from Voldemort's body. The ground shuddered, lightning flashed once more and thunder boomed through the air as the dark mass of shadows plunged into the muddy ground and exploded in a burst of crackling magic, dark powers roaring loudly as they consumed themselves until, in the end, there was none left.

The powers of Azzeh had been destroyed.

Harry stared, his eyes wide, as Voldemort staggered forward. blood was dripping from his chest and although the Dark Lord was still imposing, the shadows had disappeared from around him and his eyes had switched back to a gleaming crimson. Voldemort clasped his wand in his hand, his eyes narrowing in on Harry and for an

instant the two enemies glared at each other, hatred passing between the two. Harry, fury blazing in his mind, took a single step forward before Voldemort whipped up his wand. From it rose an inferno of blazing flames that formed into a visage of a leering serpent, four times as large as the Dark Lord himself. The fiery beast veered back as Harry halted, his eyes widening, and snapped forward in a billowing rush of heat and fiendfyre.

'The blade!' Meciél hissed.

Harry whipped the blade forward in front of him, ignoring the painful burning sensation in his hand, and silver fire sprang forward. The Fiendfyre clashed against the holy flame with a thunderous boom, flames rolling in and being washed over by the steady glow of the sword. Dark Flames extinguished themselves as Harry remained firm, feeling an odd and painful jolt in his arm as the glow of his sword became brighter and brighter, until all of the fiery serpent had disappeared. Harry glanced past the glow of his sword just in time to see Voldemort silently disappear. A few moments later, a series of pops and cracks echoed in the graveyard as the rest of the Death Eater's followed. In a matter of moments, a battlefield of powerful black magic and loud thunderous explosions had turned into a silent graveyard of flickering flames and eerie silence.

The battle was over, for now.

"Are you alright?" Came a gentle voice as Michael stepped forward, eying Harry with concern and amazement.

Harry was staring at sword in his hands with wide eyes, barely registering that his hand was sizzling underneath the power of the holy fire. Distantly he could hear both Michael and Meciél trying to capture his attention but his mind was numb. Suddenly, it all came rushing into him in a blur of colour and noise and with a grunt, Harry threw the sword to the ground. Disbelief and pure anger flashed over his face and he idly stared at his left hand, the had that been clasping the hilt of the sword. Blackened and blistering flesh greeted his eyes and he grimaced, glancing away. He noted his wand lying on a piece of rubble nearby and with a quick gesture, it soared back into his

hands. Hellfire flashed on the runes as Harry clutched it tightly, breathing heavily as he stared at the Knights with burning eyes.

"I'm fine," He said shortly, taking a slow step backwards, sarcasm dripping from his strained voice. "I'm just fucking good and dandy. Thanks for asking."

"I knew that we would need that sword," Michael said softly, sheathing his own blade and alternating his stare between the other sword and Harry. "But for you- No, I didn't think that you would be the one to claim it."

"What? What the hell is this?" Harry snarled, kicking at the now lifeless sword on the ground. It clattered on the ground and came to rest over the rubble of a marble headstone, dried blood smeared all over its blade. "What the fuck is going on? Why...I want answers, Carpenter, and you'd better tell me!"

"Usually, there are three Knights of the Cross at any given time," Michael explained softly, patience and sympathy shining in his eyes. "But the third Knight of the Cross was murdered five years ago. Since then, his sword lay unclaimed and nobody was chosen to wield it's power- nobody until today."

"The sword has claimed you as its Master," Sanya said gruffly, walking up with a terrible limp. His face was ashen as he clutched his side by his stood strong and unmoving, as if he was prepared to do battle all over again. "You are now the third and final Knight of the Cross."

Harry stared at the two Knights and let out a roaring laughter. He ignored the aches and pains in his body as he laughed, shaking his head quickly. However, the laughter held a note of hysteria to it and it died down as Harry took a deep breath, a stubborn look suddenly crossing his face.

"Impossible," Harry snarled, anger flaring up in his veins. "Doesn't it know who I am- where my loyalties lie? There is no way in hell I'm going to serve your purposes!"

"God works in mysterious ways," Michael started patiently but Harry interrupted him, blazing anger washing over his face.

"Fuck God and fuck you!" Harry roared, his eyes glittering with fury, and his voice rose up and echoed in the deadened graveyard "I don't give a fuck about God or a fuck about you! I'm sick of...I'm...I...just piss off and leave me alone!"

"Harry..." Michael started, reaching out with a gloved hand but Harry staggered back, shaking his head desperately. This wasn't right. It was all wrong. It couldn't be right. It had to be a trick of some kind, some sort of stupid prank or ploy by the Knights. Within his head, Meciell remained quiet, her presence distant. When Harry touched upon it he was met with a blast of jumbled emotions- confusion, sadness, shock and an abundance of pure hatred.

"Shut up!" Harry bellowed loudly and ducked past the Knight, striding quickly for the glinting Triwizard Cup. He could hear them calling out behind him and gave a loud snarl. He slammed his foot into the Krum's cooling corpse and with great strength, he kicked it towards the Triwizard Cup. The moment the body touched the cup the portkey was activated and the corpse, along with Harry, disappeared with a tug of a navel and a blur of flashing colours.

Amanda bit her lip, her grey eyes flashing with worry and she peered out into the large hedge maze, trying to pierce through the darkened grounds as she searched for any sign of movement. She let out a soft, worried sigh and sat back into the stands. Her eyes swung towards the judges table, where Dumbledore was talking softly to Moody, the ex-Auror shaking his grizzled head as he gestured out into the grounds. Dumbledore said nothing but Amanda blinked as the usually cheerful Headmaster's face fell, making him seem older than she had ever noticed before. Nearby, standing by the judges table stood a slightly confused Cedric and Richard and a shaky, pale Fleur, all who were watching the proceedings carefully as the school nurse tended to them.

Cedric had stumbled out of the out of the maze twenty minutes ago, bloodied but confused. According to him, the centre of the maze was devoid of any cup or trophy. Amanda had heard snippets of the conversation as Cedric told his tale, saying that he had seen damage to the area. A few minutes later Richard had also appeared at the edge of the maze, his wand flicking through the air as he levitated Fleur's unconscious body behind him. Richard had also made it to the centre of the maze and noticed the spell damage and the missing trophy. On his way back, he had found a prone and injured Fleur. When the French blonde had been revived, she swore that she had been attacked from behind and never got a chance to see who had attacked her. It hadn't taken the judges and the audience long to realise that something was wrong and Amanda was particularly aware that Harry had yet to make his way out of the maze. Of all the contestants, she figured that he would have been the first to reappear, most likely with a smug look on his face and sprouting off fifty one-liners a minute.

"What do you think's happened?" Amanda heard Ron ask Hermione from beside her. She absently listened in as she bit her lip, an anxious scowl forming on her face.

"Something's gone wrong," Hermione replied stiffly. "I knew something would go wrong. This entire tournament has gone wrong right from the start and it's probably Potter that has..."

Whatever Hermione was going to say about Harry was interrupted as somebody from the other side of the stands let out a loud holler. Amanda whirled around and saw a student pointing anxiously towards the podium, where the portkey on the trophy was meant to bring the winning champion.

"Look!" He cried out anxiously. "On the podium!"

Amanda whirled her head around and her grey eyes widened with shock as she peered at the podium and what had appeared on it. She gasped, a noise that echoed throughout the night as the entire stadium of spectators fell silent.

"Is that..." Ron trailed off, horror flying over his face.

"Harry!" Amanda breathed softly, her eyes wide with shock.

Harry looked as if he had just received the biggest thrashing of his lifetime. There was a nasty cut on his head, a soft trickle of blood oozing out of the gash and staining his cheek. His hair had been mussed up and looked as if it had been partially singed. His clothes were cut, torn and burnt and he cradled his right hand against his chest. His green eyes, usually narrowed in anger or irritation, were exhausted and wearied with lingering traces of shock, anger and hurt. On the ground next to Harry's shivering form was Krum, who stared up at the audience with blank eyes and a horrified expression. When Amanda glimpsed Krum's prone form her blood turned to ice, her heart contracting heavily in her chest. He was dead. The entire stadium, judges, Dumbledore and champions included, were silent as Harry took a limping step forward. His foot brushed by the gleaming golden trophy and it rolled off the podium, striking the ground with a loud clatter. With that noise, everybody suddenly burst into action.

"Krum!" Somebody shouted from the stands as Dumbledore sped forward, his robes flapping aside and his eyes devoid of twinkle as he made his way to Harry's side. The nurse was not far behind him and she hovered over Krum's body, rapidly swishing her wand over the motionless Durmstrang student. "He's dead! Viktor Krum is dead!"

“Oh my god,” Hermione said, her eyes brimming with tears as she shot up off her seat. “Viktor! No, not Viktor!”

The bushy-haired Gryffindor hurled herself down the steps and Amanda followed her quickly, leaving a confused and slightly slow Ron behind. The two girls pressed forward past the throngs of people who had decided to come in for a closer look and pushed their way to the front of the crowd. As soon as Hermione glimpsed Krum’s form she burst out into loud sobs, covering her mouth with her hand and falling to her knees. Amanda’s heart contracted in sympathy and hesitantly, she put as a comforting hand on her former-friend’s shoulder, staring down at the chilling sight with sad grey eyes.

The crowd was pushing forward, panicked screams and loud yells bursting out from every direction. Amanda saw Madame Maxine and her sister trying to push their way through the throngs, but not even Maxine’s large frame could help here. Suddenly she noticed Harry, his stunned eyes glancing past hers as he was led away by Moody, who had clasped the young Denarian by the arm. An instant later they had disappeared past the roaring crowd, slipping out quietly underneath the masses. Amanda stared after him, her eyes distant and her mind full of raw emotion as her friend sobbed by her side. She didn’t know how long she stood there for, holding Hermione by the shoulder and staring off into the distance, but suddenly Dumbledore was in front of her, his eyes serious.

“Ms Carpenter, did you see where Harry went?” He asked her softly, but with a sense of urgency.

“Um...yeah,” said Amanda, her voice hitching with emotion. She cleared her throat and gestured towards the gleaming castle in the background. “Professor Moody took him back to the castle.”

“Alastor? But why would...” Dumbledore said softly to himself and suddenly Amanda saw a myriad of emotions run through his eyes. Confusion was replaced by comprehension and doubt was replaced by dread. Dumbledore straightened up, the beginnings of a blazing anger coming over his face, and without another word the

Headmaster sped towards the castle, McGonagall and Snape trailing after him.

“C’mon Potter,” Moody growled, hastily screwing the lid on his flask and roughly clasping Harry by the arm. He hauled the wounded boy away from Krum’s body. Harry, his mind a whirl of emotions and pain, allowed himself to be dragged off as Moody took his past the ever-growing crowd.

Moody dragged him towards the castle, often pulling at his arm roughly. The two entered the entrance hall when Harry staggered, a flash of pain flaring in his eyes as one of his knees threatened to buckle. Moody growled and yanked him back off the ground with a painful tug on the arm. The ex-Auror’s mouth was set in a grim line and cold determination flickered in his one good eye.

“Hey,” Harry snapped, his eyes refocussing on Moody. His anger, already simmering and crackling at the surface, boiled over and he tried to tug his arm away from Moody. “Watch what the fuck you’re doing!”

“Potter!” Moody hissed angrily, tightening his grip around the thrashing Denarian’s arm. “I don’t have time for your little tantrums!”

“Let go!” Harry hissed furiously, yanking at his arm. Fury boiled in his veins as Moody refused to budge and his left hand plunged into his tattered coat, seeking his wand as he lashed out with his foot. “I said let go!”

With a hiss of pain, Moody’s grip slackened as Harry kicked him in the shins. The Professor looked furiously as Harry thrashed his way out of the scarred man’s grip with a whirl of movement. Harry’s arm smashed against Moody’s chest and the one-eyed man grunted, staggering back. Something shattered and Moody gave a panicked cry as his flask fell out of his cloak and onto the ground.

The lid, which hadn’t been put on properly, slammed open and both Harry and Moody gazed down as a thick, sludge-like liquid oozed out of the opening. Within his mind, Meciél stirred out of her own stupor.

‘Polyjuice potion!’ She hissed in warning. ‘Shape-changer!’

Harry’s eyes darted up to meet Moody’s, comprehension flashing within them. Moody stared back at Harry as the two assessed each other. Something flashed in the impostor’s eyes and Harry saw that the man knew that it was over.

“Impostor,” Harry said quietly. “You’re the Death Eater behind this.”

His words echoed loudly in the empty hallway and for a second both wizards paused. Then Moody’s face twisted up in rage and, almost simultaneously, their hands blurred as they yanked their wands out.

“Avada Keda...” Moody started quickly, green light pooling at the tip of his wand.

“Percutio!” Harry barked out. A glowing bolt of sapphire energy blasted from the tip of his wand and hit the impostor square in the chest.

There was a flare of purple light and suddenly ‘Moody’ was thrown back, dark crackles of energy cascading over his body as he slammed into the ground with a groan of pain. The impostor’s wand clattered to the ground and with a soft and disgusting squelching noise his fake eye popped out of his socket and rolled across the floor.

Harry was breathing harshly, a fiery rage glinting in his eyes as he limped his way over to the fallen man. Despite the shakes and pains in his body, Harry’s wand was firm and unmoving as he levelled it at Moody’s head.

“You were right,” Moody snarled softly. He was barely conscious as he gazed up at Harry and he was making odd motions with his mouth. “Everything that transpired this night- It was all my doing. Know that, Potter, know that I, Barty Crouch Junior, have served the Dark Lord better than any other. I am the one responsible for his revival.”

‘Kill him!’ Meciell hissed angrily, her presence flaring with her own fury as both Denarian and Fallen regarded the man beneath them. ‘He has wronged us all! Kill him now!’

“Avada ...” Harry started angrily.

“No!” Somebody’s voice boomed down the corridor and suddenly Dumbledore was there, his eyes cold and his face etched with fury. Nonetheless, he slapped down Harry’s arm as he strode forward and eyed the newly discovered Crouch with a look of utter coldness. Trailing behind him were Snape and McGonagall, the former eying the situation carefully and the latter putting a hand over her heart and gasping.

“Dumbledore,” Crouch wheezed as he turned to look at the Headmaster. A look of disdain crossed his face and he sneered at Dumbledore as he hissed out his next words. “You’ll never take me alive, you muggle-loving bastard! I...swore I would never...be taken back to...to Azkaban!”

“Severus,” Dumbledore said urgently, bending down and whipping his wand over Crouch. Whatever the spell did seemed to confirm something for Dumbledore and his eyes narrowed. “A bezoar, quickly!”

Snape quickly nodded and after sparing Harry a speculative glance he left in a whirl of cloak and robes, striding down the hallway towards the dungeons as fast as he could move.

“T-That’s right,” Crouch growled, baring his lips at Dumbledore. “Poison...in my teeth...already too late. I’m dead, Dumbledore.”

“We will see, Bartermius,” Dumbledore said calmly, but with a certain sense of detached coldness. “But as long as it is within my power then you will not escape your crimes so easily.”

“Power?” Crouch barked out softly, ending it with a long cough. “You know nothing of power! The Dark Lord will...kill you...all, kill you all...you dirty mudbloods and muggle-lovers...”

“So he has returned?” Dumbledore asked quickly, staring intently into Crouch’s eyes. Crouch grimaced and tried to turn his head away from the Headmaster’s probing stare but something held him in place. “Tell me more, Bartermius.”

‘ Legilimency. Dumbledore is peering into his mind,’ Meciél whispered into Harry’s tired ears but at the moment Harry couldn’t have cared less.

Crouch gritted his teeth and glared at Dumbledore with hatred as the older man stooped over him. Suddenly the impostor grunted in pain and gave one last jerk, before his features suddenly relaxed and his eyes reflexively closed shut. Dumbledore flicked his wand again and an ominous sparkle of red light burst above Moody’s heart. He was dead.

“ You will not escape justice in the next great adventure, Bartermius,” Dumbledore sighed softly and stood up, turning to face Harry.

“Albus, what has happened?” asked McGonagall, her face pale. “What is happening?”

“Lord Voldemort has returned,” Dumbledore said solemnly, his tired blue eyes never leaving Harry’s detached gaze. “I must ask you do something for me now, Minerva. Firstly, I need you to examine our impostor’s office. Alastor must be alive in there somewhere if Bartermius was able to keep taking samples from him. After you have found him, send him to the hospital wing then contact the old crowd, Mundungus, Remus, Arabella. We will need to move quickly.”

“How?” uttered McGonagall, her face pale as she pressed her hand to her chest. “How has this happened?”

“That, Minerva, is what I need to find out,” Dumbledore said softly, his eyes devoid of twinkle as he gestured at Harry. “We will need some privacy, Harry. Perhaps we had best do this in my office.”

Sometime later, Harry leant back into his chair and absently stared at the window, his eyes taking in the multitude of sparkling stars that lit the night sky. He could barely feel the blazing warmth of the fire as he huddled, ignoring the pains and aches in his body. From across the desk, Dumbledore heaved a great and wearied sigh and leant back into his own chair, his hands clasped together. His eyes seemed to peer into nothingness and Harry knew that he was analysing everything he had just heard.

‘We’re almost done, beloved,’ Meciél whispered soothingly. ‘We will leave Dumbledore to wage this war and we will return home. It’s almost finished.’

‘Home,’ Harry grunted tiredly in his head. He rubbed his arms, absently noticing that the limbs had gone numb. With a frown, Harry dug his nail into his arm until he drew blood and felt a spike a pain flare in his mind.

‘I don’t think that that was helpful,’ Meciél said reproachfully.

‘I’ve just went through a lot of stress,’ Harry thought back snippily. ‘Maybe I need to embrace the whole ‘Goth’ culture and start with the slicing to cope with what I’ve seen.’

‘If it makes you happy,’ Meciél said and Harry felt her give the approximate of a mental shrug. ‘Black does look good on you.’

‘Everything looks good on me,’ Harry thought tiredly and his lips twitched. ‘I am, after all, perfection.’

‘You do realise that you would have to wear makeup,’ Meciél said.

‘Really?’

‘Oh yes,’ Meciél said earnestly. ‘My previous host went through this same stage. Eyeliner, lipstick, nail polish, mascara- all black, of course, although dark red is acceptable.’

‘Your host went through all that?’ Harry thought sceptically. ‘No wonder you’re fucked up. Don’t worry, Meciél. I’ll make you better again.’

‘Oh, beloved,’ Meciél thought fondly and Harry felt a flash of affection seep into him. ‘You’re going to be fine, aren’t you?’

“Much has happened tonight,” Dumbledore said softly and Harry blinked, jerking his head up and refocussing his attention on the elderly headmaster as he stood. The frames of his glasses glinted beneath the light of the fire as Dumbledore reached out with a gnarled hand and smoothed back a red and golden bird’s plumage.

It wasn’t the first time Harry had seen Fawkes but he avoided looking at the Summer Fae, knowing that he was in no condition to be fighting off waves of glamours and faerie enchantments. Dumbledore continued, idly stroking the phoenix as he peered at Harry with eyes full of sympathy.

“You have witnessed a terrible murder and the rising of a darkness so potent that it astounds even me,” Dumbledore said softly. “You have been inflicted with terrible injuries, both physical and mental, and you have had to fight for your life once more, even after I swore that I would ensure your safety in these halls. For this, I am sorry, Harry. I am sorry that you have had to suffer through all of this. This should not have been your burden, not yet.”

“I also stubbed my toe on the way up here,” Harry said tiredly, trying and failing to muster up the enthusiasm to be snide. “If we’ve got the whole self-pity thing out of the way, kindly get to the point.’

“You have suffered, Harry, but you have prevailed and for that, I commend you,” Dumbledore said and Harry could have sworn that something entered the older man’s eyes, a mixture of pride and satisfaction. “From what you’ve told me, I am certain that this Azzeh will no longer bother our realm, especially now that the Brotherhood of the Shadow has been vanquished.”

“The Brotherhood of the Shadow?” Harry asked with a wearied frown. “Let me guess, the True-Wizards, the priests.”

“You are correct,” Dumbledore said and sighed. “I had been aware of this cult for quite some time, although they must have been recruiting new members from what you’ve told me.”

“You knew about them?” Harry said flatly and for the first time in at least an hour, something stirred in his hear- anger. “You knew what they were trying to do?”

“In a way,” Dumbledore answered and exhaled softly. He moved away from Fawkes and took a seat, resting his chin on his hands. “Harry, do you remember that Auror I told you about? Gareth McGregor?”

“The dead guy?” Harry blinked, staring at Dumbledore closely. “The one who you told everybody adopted me? What the hell does he have to do with anything?”

“Seven years ago, I detected a dark presence stirring in the forests of Albania,” Dumbledore said softly, his eyes swivelling around and resting upon a strange spindly object sitting on his shelf. “Naturally, I was concerned. Albania has always been a haven for those interested in the darker aspects of magic and there is a wealth of knowledge and power to be found for those who seek it. And, of course, I had always suspected that Lord Voldemort was not truly dead, that he had found some way to survive after your first encounter. I knew that I had to act, that I had to ensure that my worst fears were kept at bay at that Lord Voldemort remained dormant.”

“Oh, good job,” Harry muttered both Dumbledore ignored him.

“It was then that I contacted Gareth. I had personally worked with him against Lord Voldemort during the first uprising and knew him to be an honourable and a skilled man. He was rather like Alastor Moody, the real one, of course, except that he had branched off into magic’s that Alastor wouldn’t dare touch. Nonetheless, I knew that he would be perfect for the job. It was his knowledge of dark magic that

allow him to delve past the barriers of Albania and allow him to track down this source of darkness.”

“The Brotherhood,” Harry muttered, listening attentively.

“Yes, the Brotherhood,” Dumbledore said with a soft sigh. Regret and pain flashed through his light-blue eyes. “Gareth encountered them some time during his search. There was a battle and despite Gareth’s skills, he was tortured and killed. Let that be a lesson for you, Harry. The power of knowledge and skill is nothing compared to the power of luck and surprise.”

“Then what happened?” Harry prodded on.

“The Brotherhood had planned to use Gareth as a conduit of sorts, an avatar for their god,” Dumbledore said softly and there was hardness in his voice when he continued. “When I arrived to investigate Gareth’s disappearance, I too was ambushed. I was able to fight them off and discreetly follow them back to their dwelling. It was here that I stumbled on Gareth, so tortured that he could barely speak. As I tried to free him, he told me of all that he had learned- of how the Brotherhood had tired and failed to use him as a host to their god, of how they were seeking ways to gain more power of the darkness, of how they were trying to contact another spirit of darkness within the forest- a spirit I realise now that must have been Voldemort. Gareth died before I could free him and I left, unwilling to fight an unknown number of enemies within the very centre of their place of power.”

“So that’s how Voldemort and the priests met,” Harry mused softly. He could feel Meciél paying close attention as she soaked up every word Dumbledore uttered.

“I assume that naturally, Voldemort refused,” Dumbledore said. “I imagine that he would not take the notion of having to share his new body with another essence. It was only three years from then that he attempted to seize the philosopher’s stone from this very castle. After he failed, it is possible that he saw no other option but to accept the Brotherhood’s help- and their terms. With a faithful servant returning

to him last year, Lord Voldemort would have found it easy to resurrect his loyal legion of Death Eater's and prepare them for the ritual."

"Loyal servant?" Harry asked.

"A man by the name of Peter Pettigrew," Dumbledore said and stared at Harry carefully. "He is also known as Wormtail. He was a friend of your parents until he faked his death thirteen years ago."

"Wormtail, eh?" Harry said grimly, his hand coming up to idly stroke the bloodied scar settling on his face. "We're going to have words in the future, very long, agonising words involving large mental spikes and very small holes."

"I daresay that he will deserve it," Dumbledore began cautiously. "His crimes against you are worse than you could realise. But there are other people that he has harmed, people who need him alive. If you do encounter him, I urge that you do not kill him."

Harry stared at Dumbledore flatly, sensing that there was something he wasn't being told. But in the end, he shrugged and smiled coldly.

"We'll see," was all he said.

"There is one more thing that I wish to discuss with you," Dumbledore said quietly. "I have had my suspicions and I wish to confirm them. Your wand, Harry, is phoenix feather and holly, eleven inches. I am correct to say that you obtained this wand from Ollivander?"

"You might be," Harry said warily.

"As I thought," Dumbledore mumbled, more to himself than Harry. "In the graveyard, when your spell collided with Voldemort's, are you not interested in why the wands connected?"

"They connected?" Harry asked, blinking in surprise. "You mean that flash of golden light?"

“When your spell struck Voldemort’s, there was a moment when both wands were linked,” explained Dumbledore, his eyes on Harry’s face. “Your wand and Voldemort’s wand have something in common. They both share a feather from the same phoenix, Fawkes, actually,” and he pointed at the red and gold bird, who was eying the proceedings with a knowing glint in its black eyes.

“The same core?” Harry asked slowly but Meciél suddenly gave a mental throb of comprehension, as if Dumbledore’s statement had revealed everything to her.

“In such cases, these wands become, in lack of a better word, brothers,” said Dumbledore. “When a wand meets its brother then they will not work properly against each other. If, however, the owners of the wands force the wands to do battle...a very rare effect will take place. *Priori Incantatem*, the reverse-spell effect. The wands will connect and try to force the other to regurgitate the spells it has performed. Had you not dropped the connection and been able to force Voldemort’s wands into the *Priori Incantatem* effect, you would have seen the last spells he had performed on his wand. It is possible that given some time, some form of your parents would have appeared.”

“My parents are dead,” Harry said flatly.

“The Killing Curse is a powerful piece of magic, Harry,” Dumbledore said softly and suddenly looked very old. “It is dark magic that is capable of retaining a tiny portion of its victims. Somewhere, deep in Voldemort’s wand, exists a tiny part of your parents.”

“Can they be revived?” Harry asked after a minute’s silence, staring at Dumbledore neutrally.

“They are shades, Harry,” Dumbledore said, shaking his head. “They are fragments, a snap-shot of one particular moment in one particular day in one particular week in one particular year. All that would have happened is a kind of reverse echo, a shadow of life that once existed, an echo that would have retained your parents appearance and manners.”

“I would have accepted a ‘no’,” Harry muttered and winced as he stood up, grimacing as the aches and pains flared up in his body.

“Tonight, Harry, you have shown bravery beyond anything that I could have expected from you,” Dumbledore said heavily. “You have shown bravery of those who have fought and died fighting Voldemort at the height of his powers, and more. You have taken on the incarnation of a terrible being, one whose power would have made the entire world shake at its knees, and you have triumphed against the will of darkness and suffering.”

“Does this mean I can get a letter of recommendation from you?” Harry muttered half-heartedly and sighed, waving his hand and grimacing. “I know, I know, that sucked but give me a break. I’m tired, and I’m hurt, and I’m sore.”

“Understandable,” Dumbledore said and rose from his seat. “Madame Pomfrey can see to your wounds. Perhaps I should have taken you there first but it was imperative that I find out what had happened this night. I will take...”

But Harry was already shaking his head.

“I’ll pass,” He said flatly and Dumbledore blinked in surprise. “It’s over, Dumbledore.”

“Harry?” Dumbledore questioned, his blue eyes examining Harry carefully.

“The tournament,” Harry grunted, pleasure escaping his voice. “It’s over. I’m the winner, or somebody else is but I honestly don’t give a shit right now, and that means that the contract binding me is fulfilled. I can leave.”

“Harry, you mustn’t...”

“Oh no,” Harry spat, his eyes darkening as the outer shell of his composure started to crack. Anger and pain seeped into his voice as

he glared at Dumbledore with a furious expression on his face. "I'm done. It's over. I'm finished. Nicodemus is dead; Azzeh is dead, no more people trying to kill me, no more stupid tournament, no more fucking contracts. I'm free and I'm leaving!"

"Harry, Azzeh is dead but Lord Voldemort most certainly is not," Dumbledore said urgently. "Injured and deprived of Azzeh's power he may be, but he is alive. It will not take him long to recover and you will be one of his targets. You will not be safe..."

"I haven't been safe ever since I got here!" Harry exploded and Dumbledore blinked as a vase on his shelf shattered into a hail of debris. Harry was clenching his hands as he furiously glared at Dumbledore, his teeth grinding together. "And if I've learnt anything from this school then it's that I'll be a hell of a lot safer on my own than I am here! I want to leave- I have to leave and I can't be here anymore!"

"Harry..." Dumbledore tried once more, his eyes dulled with pain.

"Are you going to try to stop me?" Harry asked quietly, dangerously and with slow, casual movements, he pulled out his wand. His eyes bore into Dumbledore who hesitated and then sighed, sinking back into his chair and looking far older than Harry had ever seen him before.

"I daresay that I could if I wished to," Dumbledore answered quietly. "But that would not do either of us any good. I do not want you to feel as a prisoner, Harry. I have never wanted that from you. You are right; you are free to go as you please. But consider your friends, Harry, and the connections that you have made here. Do not throw these away lightly for..."

"Good," Harry interrupted, breathing deeply. "I want a portkey. To Diagon Alley. Now."

Dumbledore stared at Harry for a moment, his gaze searching the young Denarian's face carefully. Finally, the Headmaster pulled out his wand and motioned towards a quill on his desk. He said no words

but the quill flashed with a deep blue light and shuddered as Dumbledore created a portkey. After a few moments, the elderly man was done and he leant back in his chair as Harry moved forward to take the quill.

“Harry,” Dumbledore said and Harry paused. “Do be careful.”

Without another word, Harry grasped the quill and felt a wrench at his navel. His vision disappeared in an undistinguishable mess of colours and lights and the last thing he saw was the twinkling gaze of Albus Dumbledore before he disappeared from Hogwarts.

Harry reappeared in a place that he had not seen for several years, just outside the Leaky Cauldron and before the barrier. Without a word, he threw down the feather and turned to cinder with a flick of his wand. Without even bothering to glance around, he summoned a dirty rock from the ground and held it in his hand.

“Portus!” He muttered and allowed himself to relax as Meciél busied herself with the particulars of the spell. When it was finished, he threw the rock in the air and caught it in his hand. Almost instantly there was another tug at his navel and Harry found himself drawn into a dizzying vortex of rushing wind and flashing colour as he was transported from England to the other side of the world.

He arrived in his apartment, sliding past his wards and appearing in his bare living room. For a moment, Harry just stood there, breathing deeply as he breathed in the cool and stale air for the first time in months. He was trembling and he could feel the bones in his body creak as he took a step forward, dropping the stone on the ground with a thud and approaching the kitchen.

‘Beloved...’ Meciél began and her voice was enough to make him start. With a grunt, he slammed his foot into one of the stools by the bench and hissed with pain.

Suddenly, it was as if the floodgates had been opened and Harry snapped. With a roar of fury, Harry grabbed the stool and lifted it above his head, slamming it down on the ground with all of his

strength. The wood shattered as Harry slammed it down again and again, his eyes full of roaring hate as he chucked the remains to the side.

“Son of a bitch!” roared Harry, his voice thick with pain and anger. He stormed into the living room, trembling erratically as he levelled wand at the nearest target, a small foot cushion. Without uttering a single word, the cushion exploded in a wave of feathers and cloth. Harry snarled, whipping his wand around as he poured all of his rage, anger, fear and pain into his spells. The wooden floorboards around him were ripped apart under his fury, the kitchen bench shattered and pulverised into wooden splinters, the summoning circle and runes that Harry had so painstakingly create destroyed with a thought.

Finally, after a minute or so, he stopped. For a moment Harry just stood there, breathing deeply and suddenly feeling drained. He sighed and felt a sudden heat at the back of his eyes. Growling in annoyance, he rubbed them furiously, just as somebody knocked on his door.

“Who’s there?” Somebody yelled and Harry recognised the voice of his landlord. “This is private property and I’m armed! Don’t make me call the police!”

“It’s me,” Harry called out tiredly, exhaling loudly and rubbing his hand through his hair.

“Oh,” uttered the voice, surprised. “When did you get back?”

“Just now,” Harry replied and suddenly he felt so very tired. “It’s not a good time now, I’ll...I’ll talk to you later, alright?”

“Is everything fine?” The voice asked, sounding concerned.

“Will you just piss off?” Harry snarled and in an instant his anger came raging to the surface. He glared at the door and fingered his wand, his eyes glittering with emotion. The landlord, however, seemed to have taken the heat and Harry heard footsteps shuffling away from the door. His anger drained away and suddenly he could

feel every single bruise and ache on his body. He staggered out of the living room and into his bedroom and his wand clattered to the ground as he collapsed on the covers, his eyes closed.

Suddenly warmth blazed in his mind and Harry could faintly feel Meciél appearing as an illusion before him. He opened his eyes and gazed at her with wearied and hurt eyes. Meciél stared down at him, her eyes radiating concern, affection and...was that love he saw? Suddenly Harry felt like a child but for once he didn't mind as Meciél took him in her arms, her warmth spreading all over his body and mind, banishing his hurts away.

"It will be alright, beloved," she said quietly as she held him. Harry was silent. "I will make everything better."

Slowly, Meciél bent down and pressed a kiss into his hair, her hand stroking it back as she comforted him. Harry relaxed into her arms, suddenly feeling very vulnerable. Meciél's warmth blazed in his body and he sensed that after a moment, she had reached a decision. Slowly, Meciél moved around him, her gaze intent.

"I will..." After a moment, she moved down to his forehead... "Make..." and then his cheeks, first on the left... "Everything..." and then on the right... "...feel..." and then she paused over his lips, her luminous silver eyes staring into his green gaze, "...better." She whispered and then moved her lips down to claim Harry's. The most pleasurable sensation washed over him as Meciél's warmth seemed to merge with his very body and suddenly the anger, hate and pain were gone and his vision was filled with bright light as he responded with all of his vigour.

## The Daily Prophet

### Murder at Hogwarts! Tri-Wizard Champion Viktor Krum Slain!

The Third and final task of the infamous Tri-Wizard Tournament ended in heartbreak last night as popular Quidditch Star and Durmstrang Champion Viktor Krum was murdered by an unknown party.. Ministry specialists have deduced that Krum's death was the result of the dreaded Killing Curse, the most powerful of the Unforgivable curses. Although detail are sketchy, reports state that Krum fell victim to an unauthorised Portkey and was subsequently murdered in an undisclosed location.

Recent information given to the Daily Prophet indicates that Harry Potter, the Boy-Who-Lived and Fifth Champion of the Tri-Wizard accompanied Krum on his fateful journey. When Potter and Krum returned, Krum was dead while Potter was seen sporting bloodied injuries and described as being 'in a deep state of shock.'

"We were all sitting there, waiting for something to happen," Marietta Edgecomb, a fourth-year Hogwarts student says. "And then Potter appeared, and Krum was on the ground...and then everybody was screaming...and Potter was just standing there."

Potter, the illegal fifth champion of the Tri-Wizard tournament, is considered to be the most likely suspect. Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts and Chief of the Wizenamgot, has released a transcript of Potter's statement of the events. Unfortunately, when Auror's from the Department of Magical Law Enforcement came to interview Potter, it was discovered that the wayward boy-who-lived had fled the scene to an undisclosed location. When asked about the transcript, Albus Dumbledore replied to Auror queries saying that 'Harry has witnessed something more terrible than you or I could possible imagine...he deserves a chance to recuperate.'

According to Dumbledore, Potter claimed that both he and Krum were taken to an unidentified graveyard where they were both ambushed by Death Eater's. Krum was killed almost instantly and Potter was captured, where, according to highly unbelievable reports, was forced to witness the return of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. Afterwards,

Potter supposedly duelled his way past You-Know-Who and dozens of Death Eater's and escaped to Hogwarts with Krum's body in tow. When asked to comment, Minister Fudge was sceptical.

"I'll admit that something tragic has happened here, but to suggest that You-Know-Who is back...just unbelievable. What's worse, Dumbledore seems to be pushing Potter's story forward to anybody to listen. This is just an attention-seeking plot from a troubled young youth spurned on by the eccentric behaviour of a senile old man. You-Know-Who is not back."

This incident has caused an international outcry between the Bulgarian Ministry of Magic the Department of International Magical Co-operation, the former citing that the latter had failed in its security promises and that there would be 'consequences'. Head of Department Bartermius Crouch has gone missing, putting a further strain on relations as new Head Andrew Yaxley finds himself unable to ease tensions. The Minister of Magic himself has promised a full investigation and inquiry into the murder of Viktor Krum and assured both the public and the Bulgarian Ministry that there would be answers. When asked about Dumbledore's unshakable belief of the return of You-Know-Who, the Minister laughed.

'Dumbledore is seeing giants where there are gnomes,' Fudge assured. 'At worst- at the very worst- then this was some kind of insane copy-cat killer, and rest assured, our vigilant Aurors will find him!'

Harry Potter was unavailable for comment

Amanda absently poked at her food, her grey eyes wandering around the Great Hall. It was the end of year feast yet there was no celebrations, no friendly chatter. Black drapes lined the ceiling, replacing the colourful house banners, and the entire staff wore customary funeral robes in a sign of respect. The Durmstrang students seemed particularly down and were the recipients of a great deal of sympathy from the rest of the school. Cedric sat next to Fleur and Richard, barely touching his food as he stared into his goblet, as if the answers to everything that had happened lay in there. The

entire Hall was full of sorrowful whispers and speculative muttering as students talked with each other about what had happened.

The rumour mill was going crazy over the recent events that had occurred at the Third Task and no two stories seemed to match. One of the monsters had attacked and killed Krum. No, it was the other champions; they had all ganged up on the two best champions. No, it was Potter himself who had killed Krum. No, Krum had tried to kill Potter and his own killing curse had backfired. There were two rumours that everybody seemed to scorn, saying that they were too ridiculous to be true. The first one claimed that Potter and Krum were lovers and Krum's other girlfriend had caught them and tried to kill them. The second one claimed that Krum and Potter were attacked by You-Know-Who and that the Dark Lord had returned. Many laughed at both of them but Amanda shuddered at the second one. Something in her told her that the rumour was closer to the truth than anybody else thought.

"May I have your attention please?" Dumbledore asked quietly and the entire hall fell silent as the elderly headmaster stood up. His periwinkle gaze was absent of twinkle and it looked as if a heavy burden had been placed on the old man's shoulders. Nonetheless, Dumbledore stood tall and proud, the very picture of a perfect wizard, and his eyes raked across the hall, ensuring that everybody was watching him.

"It is the end of another year," Dumbledore started. "Like others, this year has been full of excitement. Unlike others, we at Hogwarts today must say goodbye and acknowledge the loss of a very fine young wizard. Viktor Krum was a talented wizard, an unrivalled Quidditch player and more importantly, a good friend to many of us here. Viktor was the very epitome of the champion he was chosen to become. His death is a great loss for all of us, so let us stand and raise our goblets to Viktor Krum."

The entire hall stood, benches scraping against stone, and one low, rumbling voice filled the hall as everybody murmured, "Viktor Krum"

Amanda stared at Dumbledore as she raised her glass and for a moment it seemed as if the Headmaster had stared directly at her. She blinked and when she looked again, the rest of the hall was sitting down. She sat down and listened as Dumbledore continued.

“It is not fair, to Viktor’s friends and peers and to the world, to deny the real cause behind Viktor’s death. I have heard many speculating as to what happened, some coming closer to the truth than you realise. In truth, Viktor Krum was murdered by Lord Voldemort.”

A panicked whisper spread through the hall. Students stared at Dumbledore with disbelief and horror as he stood there, perfectly calm and waiting for them to fall silent. Amanda exchanged a grim look with Hermione and Ron and turned back to the Headmaster.

“The Ministry of Magic does not wish for me to tell you this,” Dumbledore said and something hardened in his eyes. “Your parents may be horrified that I have told you this. There are some who, in the coming months, will refuse to hear the truth. They will prefer the bliss of ignorance, heedless of the darkness that threatens to topple this world. But the truth cannot be denied. Lord Voldemort has returned. If we refuse to acknowledge this simple truth then good wizards and witches may die. One already has. Another is suffering as we speak.

Dumbledore peered over his half-moon glasses at the hall and his gaze was enough to stifle any whispers.

“There is somebody else who must be mentioned when we talk of Viktor Krum’s death. I am, of course, talking about Harry Potter.”

Amanda perked up, her eyes widening as she stared at Dumbledore unblinkingly, ignoring the mutters that sprang up around her.

“Harry Potter and Viktor Krum were lured into an ambush by Lord Voldemort,” Dumbledore continued. “During the subsequent fighting, Harry and Viktor were able to inflict a great deal of damage to Lord Voldemort and his followers. Lord Voldemort himself was grievously wounded. If it were not for Harry’s courage, loyalty and steadfast dedication, Viktor would never have been returned to us and Lord

Voldemort would have had all the time he needed to build his power within the shadows. There have been very few wizards who have shown such bravery in facing Lord Voldemort. Harry's injuries were severe and he is currently recuperating at a safe location, but I ask that you raise your glasses and honour him."

Amanda stood up, her glass clutched in her hand and warmth prickling the back of her eyes. Emotion flooded through her veins but she stood strong and murmured 'Harry Potter' with the other students.

"The Wizarding World is at a crossroad," Dumbledore said. "On one path lies Lord Voldemort and the darkness he will bring against us. On the other path lies a path of courage, a path of righteousness. There will come a time when every one of us will be forced to walk down one of these paths. Will we do what is easy, and walk down the path of darkness, or shall we rise above apathy, stand firm to our morals and shoulder our way into righteousness. It is a decision that you and you alone will have to make."

Dumbledore's gaze swept over the hall and Amanda noticed that several students ducked under his gaze. The intense glow in his eyes faded and a gentle smile crossed his face.

"Until then, let me extend an invitation to all of our guests here. In these dark and troubled times, we must move past the barriers of habit and language and unite against a common enemy. Only through uniting will we be able to stand against this threat. Remember Viktor Krum and his friendship. Remember Harry Potter and his courage. Together, we will stand and together, we will succeed."

The hall exploded in a wave of applause as Dumbledore bowed his head. Amanda barely noticed as her mind filled with thoughts of Harry. Something hot burst in her heart, a wave of intense affection and sympathy and for a moment, Amanda missed Harry more than she could have possibly imagined. Still, there was some part of her that was certain that Harry's path would cross with her once more. It would only be a matter of time.

Harry took his time waking up, allowing himself the pleasure to slowly stretch out his limbs. His body still throbbed and ached in various places and there was a strange tingling sensation on his face but he was feeling much better now than before he had gone to sleep, courtesy of Meciél's healing abilities. Meciél's warm presence blazed across his mind and Harry sighed, opening his sleepy eyes and gazing around.

"Good morning, beloved," Meciél chimed and paused, cocking her head thoughtfully. "Or should I say afternoon."

"Morning, Meciél," Harry greeted and pushed himself out of bed. Yawning, he made his way out of his bedroom on bare feet, tip-toeing over the carnage that was the living room. He glanced around and winced, scratching his head sheepishly. "I probably should have stayed at Hogwarts long enough to get the prize money." He muttered.

"It appears that you might need it," Meciél said in amusement. Harry took a moment to stare at her, pausing as he took in her sparkling silver eyes and the beautiful smile across her face. "If you are done checking me out, beloved, you may want to check the door."

Harry blinked and suddenly his perceptions returned to him and the sound of a loud knock filled the apartment. Harry made a face and gave a soft groan but he walked across the room, putting on his actor's face as he opened the door.

"Er...good afternoon, Harry," Adam, the landlord, greeted. His eyes widened as he stared past Harry at the damage to the apartment but his expression softened as he took in Harry's red-rimmed eyes and sad, haunted face. "What's wrong?"

"There's been a...death," Harry said softly, his green eyes dull. He managed a watery smile of apology. "I'm sorry about last night. I just got back when I heard the news and I...didn't take it well, I think."

“That’s alright Harry,” Adam said in sympathy. “I just came over to tell you that somebody left this parcel for you.”

Harry blinked as Landlord handed him a long cylinder parcel and frowned as he stared at it in confusion.

“Your rent is covered up until next month,” Adam said and paused. “I...er...my condolences for your loss.”

“Thanks,” Harry said softly and Adam gave an awkward nod before he turned around and walked away. Harry closed the door and his face instantly morphed back into an emotionless mask.

“Three guesses as to what’s in the parcel,” murmured Meciél, her eyes suddenly remote and her face blank.

“It can’t be,” Harry said uneasily. “It’s only been twelve or so hours. It wouldn’t have had time to get here.”

But his worst fears were confirmed when he opened up the parcel and a slender wooden cane fell out of it, clattering to the ground. After it came a gleaming sword, resembling a Japanese Katana more than anything else. Harry stared at it with a blank expression on his face before a sudden burst of anger glinted in his eyes.

“Fuck that,” He hissed loudly and stood up, giving the sword a good kick. It sailed across the room and clattered against one of the walls. Harry stood, breathing harshly as he strode to the kitchen. With hands trembling with rage, he poured himself a glass of water and gulped it down. “I will not play that game, Meciél,” he snapped.

Meciél was silent and her illusion showed nothing of her true feelings. However, Harry could feel her thinking within his head, her thought processes too fast and too complex for him to even behind to comprehend. After a few moments, Harry took a deep breath and calmed down. His eyes sought out the sword and he strode across the room, bending down to study it. The wooden cane had a slit in it, acting as a sheath to the sword. It was the first time he had seen the blade in great detail. Silver steel gleamed brightly under Harry’s eye

and the hilt was worn yet sturdy. There was absolutely no indication that the sword was one of the most powerful weapons on the planet, a weapon of the Knight of a Cross.

“It is a powerful weapon though,” Harry mused out loud, his mind whirling with possibilities. “It has to be if it can cut through outsiders like they’re nothing, and I do have a lot of Denarian enemies. This could be useful.”

Gingerly, Harry touched the hilt of the sword. Almost instantly he snapped it back, wincing in pain. The metal felt as if it had been heated under a forge and Harry grimaced, staring at the faded blisters on his hands, the results of the sword’s power from last night.

“I might want to wear gloves,” He muttered slowly, licking his lips and staring at the sword carefully.

“Are you sure about this, beloved?” Meciell asked quietly.

“Do you think I should?” Harry asked in return, his eyes swivelling to meet hers. For a moment, Harry saw uncertainty in her features.

“I have no advice to give you,” Meciell said quietly. “This is not a situation I have ever faced nor considered. However, the ramifications of this will be enormous. For the first time in history, one of the Swords of the Cross will be wielded by the very thing that it was created to destroy.”

“The Knights can go fuck themselves for all I care,” Harry snorted in disdain. “As a matter of fact, so can God. If they want to put a powerful weapon into my hands, then so be it. Besides,” he said as a thought occurred in his mind. A nasty grin spread over his face as he turned his head back to the sword. “I have some unfinished business to take care of and this sword could be very useful.”

One Week Later

In a ratty part of Los Angeles, a man dressed in faded clothes sprinted through a dingy apartment block. He looked over his shoulder, his face twisted in fear as he approached a door and fumbled for the doorknob. With shaking hands, the man burst into the apartment and raced over the other side of the room for a long wooden staff. Just when the man grasped the staff and started to activate the wards, the door exploded forward off its hinges and a figure walked through, making the other man quake with fear. Harry sneered at the man, dressed in a dark trench coat and dark pants, looking like something the other man would see in a movie. His green eyes were glinting with anger and disdain as he lashed out with a solid bar of silver flames. The sword in his gloved hand sliced through the wooden staff, eliciting a shocked gasp from the man. The man took a staggered step backwards, swallowing nervously and shivering, and Harry allowed an smile of dark amusement cross his face.

“Strike one, you tried to kill me,” Harry said softly, prowling forward menacingly. “Strike two, you sent a weak-arse demon after me. C’mon, give me a little credit here. Strike three, you stayed behind to gloat after the Second Task. I mean, c’mon, common sense should tell you that acting like the bad guys in the movies is a bad thing because, frankly, when do you ever see them winning?”

“Look...” The man started but Harry raised a gloved hand, his eyes narrowing in warning, and the man gulped and closed his mouth.

“If we were playing baseball then you’d already be out but your incompetence knows no bounds,” Harry said mockingly. “Strike Four- You tried to run from me. I’m all sweaty so now it’s going to be even more painful, purely out of annoyance. Fifth and final strike, you stupidly considered that Meciell would even want to touch a weak, pathetic loser like yourself.”

“You’re a Knight of the Cross,” the wizard breathed, staring at the sword with awe and confusion. Suddenly he laughed, a dark and mocking laugh, and the fear left his face as he stood up straight, gazing at Harry imperiously. “A Denarian is a knight of the cross.”

“Irony, eh?” Harry said, grinning maliciously. The sword in his right hand suddenly flashed with silver fire as Harry took a step forward. “Now, let’s begin this, shall we?”

“Wait! I repent, I repent!” The man shouted loudly, a mocking and victorious smile on his face and Harry halted, the smile dropping from his face as the other wizard continued. “I ask forgiveness from God for my sins and promise never to do dark magic ever again. Please forgive me, sir knight?”

Harry blinked and took another step forward, the sword of silver fire in his hands burning with a constant glow. The man’s smile faltered at Harry’s actions and he shook his head in denial.

“Oh, no, I know all about you knights,” he spat out in disgust. “You’re here to make us sinners, Denarians or not, seek repentance. You’re all about mercy and shit like that. You can’t kill me now that I’ve repented and seen the error of my ways!”

“Strike six,” Harry started, darkness brewing beneath his crisp emerald gaze and the words spilled from his mouth like poisoned honey. “You believe that since I have the sword, I must be a Knight.” Harry leant forward as if imparting a great secret and his next words were barely more than a whisper. “Strike seven; you seem to be under the delusion that I give a rat’s arse about mercy and repentance.”

The black wizard blinked and suddenly comprehension dawned on his face as Harry threw the silver sword away. He began to stammer, indecipherable words pouring out of his mouth as Harry pulled out his wand, the runes glowing with bitter Hellfire. The man stopped stammering as something flashed in Harry’s eyes, the barest hint of silver, and suddenly a dark smile curved the young Denarian’s face.

Outside on the rainy street, a young man and woman glanced up as a long, piercing wail filled the air, tugging at their stomachs, and they both flinched nervously as the scream continued. Their eyes found a window in the nearby apartment building, where a light red glow was flashing in harmony with the screams. They shivered and scurried

away, seeking shelter in a nearby café. Had they stayed and looked, they would have seen a body slam against the window, a horrified expression on its face as it slowly slid down and out of sight, leaving a dark streak of blood on the glass. Minutes later, a roaring ball of fire shattered the window and leapt forward as the apartment exploded. People left their houses and apartments and gathered on the streets and panicked people burst from the building doors and stared at the flames licking out of the window.

In the commotion, nobody noticed a green-eyed boy with black hair, dark clothes and a cylinder postal package strapped to his back. The boy walked from the pack of bystanders with a grim smile on his face, and inner fire burning in his eyes and blood still dripping from his gloved hands, before he twirled on his feet and disappeared with a soft pop, a Denarian Renegade no longer, but a Denarian Knight.